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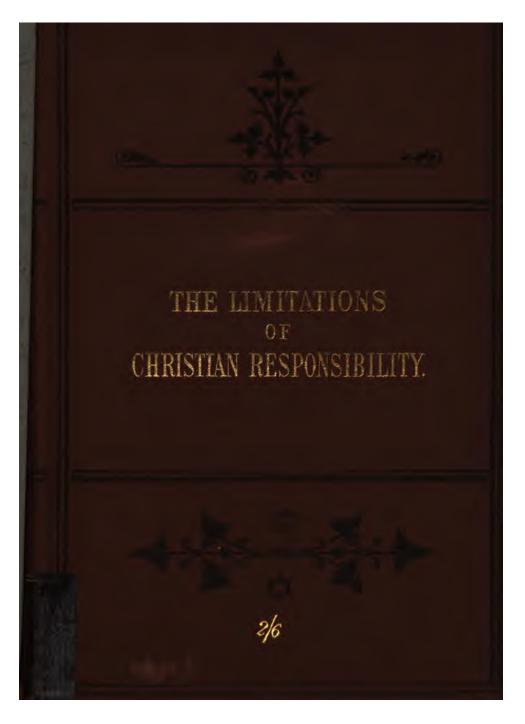
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CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

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THE ·

LIMITATIONS

OF

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY:

THOUGHTS ON

AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY.

By HENRY DUNN.

LONDON:

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.,

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INTRODUCTION.

THE object of this little book is twofold. It is intended to set forth the limitations of Christian responsibility in relation to the ungodly, and, if it be possible, to promote the reconsideration by qualified persons of much that is embodied in evangelical theology.

The first—the limitations in question—may without difficulty be defined. They are laid down by Christ himself when, speaking of the coming of the Holy Ghost after His departure, He says, 'When He is come, He will reprove [marg. convince] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.'

What the Holy Spirit does, the believer is also to do. He is not called upon to denounce, but to instruct. He is to impress, so far as he can, upon all over whom he has influence, the fact that sin is the greatest of evils; that its root is separation from God,—thinking, speaking and acting, as if God were not; that it is the practical assertion of independence; that it supposes a careless ignorance of what God would have us to be, and that this ends, as it infallibly must, in disobedience and selfishness.

With equal fidelity, but with all modesty and meekness, he is bound to do his best to make men sensible that 'righteousness,' doing right, or, in other words human duty, can only be understood by a knowledge of God as revealed in Christ; that right conduct must therefore, from the very nature of things, include the imitation of our Redeemer; that living to God is simply living as Christ lived,—a life of obedience and unselfishness.

A Divine basis of character and conduct being thus found, the kind of 'judgment' that follows death becomes obvious. It is a judgment of works; a strictly righteous judgment; a reaping-time, naturally and necessarily following the period of sowing.

When, by convincement of the Spirit, a man believes this, he cannot but be startled by the consideration that there lies behind him a past that has to be accounted for, and a future clouded by the consciousness of moral weakness too great to justify bright anticipations. The cry of his heart now is, 'What must I do to be saved?'

And now it is that the Gospel comes in with its blessed announcement that the past is pardoned, and the future provided for. Now he learns that he is forgiven; for 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses;' that consequently Christ by His Holy Spirit is willing to come and dwell in the heart of every man who

desires His presence there; that Holy Scripture, given for correction and instruction in 'righteousness,' is to be read with an object, and for a purpose, viz., to ascertain the character and will of the heavenly Father; that the voice from heaven to him is 'Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace.'

Attempted solutions of the philosophy of redemption, dissertations on texts, discussions of doctrine, and human appeals, however earnest, are far more likely to hinder than to help an awakened man in his progress heavenward. For the application of truth to the conscience, to given conditions and necessities of which we know little or nothing, is altogether beyond us. All we can do is to present it, in the hope that silent thought and earnest prayer will be followed by regenerating grace and Divine communion.

The necessity for re-investigating our beliefs arises out of the fact that the transition state of theological opinion which has prevailed amongst us for some time past, is, at length, rapidly culminating in an unbelief which, although often avowed, is still more frequently cherished in secret.

Alike in pulpits and in private conversation doctrines once prominent, are now, by common consent, dropped. That of eternal punishment, for instance, which, however unscriptural, is the keystone of Augustinianism,—at present discredited rather than denied,—is rarely proclaimed with distinctness, and too often carries with it

into kindred oblivion all that relates to future retribution. The doctrine of Election, long frightfully misconceived and abused, is in like manner quietly ignored; while the Second Advent of Christ, absolutely denied if associated with any restoration of the lost, is seldom alluded to except in connection with fanciful theories of millenarianism.

We are, in fact, without being conscious of it, living over again the life of decaying Puritanism, as it was exhibited in England towards the close of the seventeenth century, and which ended, as we all know, in a frightful state of spiritual torpor. For then, as now, disintegration went on through processes silent and secret; changes in opinion were not so much avowed as felt; congregations were kept together by personal attachments rather than by positive teaching; and spiritual life departed, simply because the people, unfed by their spiritual guides, exchanged, as we are doing, piety for politics, and lived for the seen and temporal instead of for that which, although unseen, is eternal.

The bearing of all this on what I have termed 'Aggressive Christianity' will become manifest as we proceed.

AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

CHRIST'S WORK ON EARTH.

Few thoughtful persons can have read the Life of Christ as recorded in the gospels, without a feeling of surprise, sometimes not unmingled with perplexity, as they have observed and meditated upon the limitations of our Lord's personal work in the world.

He comes, we are told, to earth in order that the world through Him might be saved. He is manifested to take away its sin; to destroy the works of the devil; to bring peace on earth and good-will to men; and yet, so far as appearances go, He accomplished none of these things. War has not ceased, or even raged upon the earth with less fierceness since the Lord's advent; the devil has not been less active or less mischievous than he was before that great event; nor has sin in any degree less abounded.

To accomplish the great work proposed, Christ personally, when on earth, may in one sense be said to have done very little. His ministry was singularly brief in duration; its sphere still more singularly contracted. His teaching was limited. His whole life-work was evidently marked by strong restraint on the exercise, not only of the unbounded power He possessed, but, which is far more marvellous, in the goings forth of an equally boundless love. Nay, more; explain the fact as we may, "Christ did not destroy any great iniquity. He came as 'the light of the world,' but He left it apparently about as dark as before. He came that the world through Him 'might be saved,' and yet in a few years He went away before the greater part of the world knew He had been here at all, and He left it about as bad as it was when He appeared,—'as wicked and as wretched." 1

Of course it is not difficult to explain these apparent anomalies, or to show the perfect accordance of the course followed by the Saviour when on earth with the highest wisdom and the deepest love. But it is not so easy to show, as the essayist to whom I have referred attempts to do, that, in the absence of continued supernatural

¹ Essay by the President of Ripon College, Wis., U.S., art. x., in Dickinson's Theological Quarterly, No. 2, April, 1875.

power, of miracles, and of increased light as to truth, Christianity is adequate to fulfil its supposed work in the world. I mean, of course, if it is to be assumed that Christians are right in indulging the great hopes they expect to be one day realized; that they are right in believing that, in spite of all the divisions, errors, and ignorances of Christ's disciples, the world through them is to be converted, and the knowledge of the Lord to 'cover the earth, as the waters do the sea.' The Professor goes so far as to say, "The Church is competent to all the work required of it for the propagation and prevalence of Christianity in the world, without any further personal work of Christ, and without any more truths, gifts, or powers than He has provided." The proof that this is the case he finds in the fact that, "in spite of all that Jewish and Pagan opposition could do, in less than three centuries after the Ascension, Christianity was the prevalent religion of the Roman Empire." The character of that Christianity,—its moral value, seems to be unworthy of notice.

"The faint-hearted," he says, "or remiss or impatient Christian may wish Christ would come again, and reward faith by His personal presence. But this cannot be. To secure fidelity, Christ must devolve on the Church the whole work, which belongs to it, and the doing of which is essential to its vigour and growth. If He should

relieve it of its work in case it should be unfaithful, He would abet its unfaithfulness."

In spite of these extravagances, I repeat that it is not easy to show, although very easy to affirm, that any adequate power for the accomplishment of the conversion of the world is at present in the hands of men. Nor is it possible to prove, from anything recorded in Scripture, that such power ever will be given; that it is the Divine intention through man, to win the world to Christ; or, that the eternal welfare of any one of us was ever made dependent on the zeal and fidelity of another human being, which must be the case if the popular notion be a true one.

Refore, however, these views can be received, involving, as they do, a very considerable limitation of what is now supposed to be the responsibility of Christians with regard to the unconverted, several questions of no slight importance require to be examined. With some of these we shall endeavour to deal.

CHAPTER II.

A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY REGARDING CHURCHES.

Q.—'For what purpose has Christ established a Church or Churches on the earth, with all their varied agencies, if believers are not charged with the duty of evangelizing the world,—if the safety of the ungodly is not made more or less dependent on the prayers, efforts, and holy zeal of the godly?'

I reply, although our Professor will be much shocked at the assertion, that no evidence whatever, of value, can be brought forward to show that any Church—save that invisible one which is a part of Christ's mystical body, and which consists of all renewed persons who may at any time or place be upon the Earth—was ever established by the Lord or His Apostles.

Churches there certainly were, both in Judea and elsewhere, when the Apostles were upon the earth, and these were governed by a miraculous discipline, exercised by men gifted with special wisdom and power as well as with a rod, for such guidance and governance (Acts v. 1-15).

But these Churches were temporary, and died with their originators. Every such association since then has been of human and not of divine origin, existing only jure humano, and most useful when recognised as optional.

Nowhere can it be shown from Scripture that God has committed the Evangelization of the World to any organized body or bodies whatever; or, as I have already said, made the eternal safety of any one man to depend on the zeal and fidelity of another. The opposite notion, first broached after the fall of Jerusalem and the death of the Apostles, laid the foundation for that great 'Mystery of Iniquity' which has ever since, in various forms of Ecclesiasticism, overshadowed Christianity, changed its character, and well-nigh deprived it of life and power.¹

Further, there is not a text in Scripture which, fairly

¹ It is not advisable to say more on this subject here, since the topic has been fully discussed by me in "The Churches: a History and an Argument." SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & Co., Crown 8vo., 6s. I merely observe that this great question cannot be narrowed to the consideration of the excellence or usefulness of this or that particular Church, but must be treated as a whole, embracing all existing Churches, whether Catholic or Protestant, Greek or Syrian, orthodox or unorthodox. Even Mormonism, with all its abominations, professes to be a Church of Christ, and builds itself upon the supposed Divine authority of Churches.

considered and read in connection with its context, justifies for a moment the assertion that the mercy of God to a sinner, which is everlasting, must be limited by time and confined to earth, or that in any essential particular, God's dealings with the wicked in the world to come will be materially different from what they are in this. To quote, as so many do, and think the passage conclusive as a reply, 'If the tree fall toward the south or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth there it shall lie'—to quote, I say, this text, without regard to its connection and true purport, which is almost always done, is but to play with a subject far too serious for trifling.

That the world to come will be a world of retribution is unquestionable, for every man will reap there as he has sown here; and there are blessings which, if despised and rejected now, will never be offered again, even though they should be sought, as Esau sought his despised birthright, with bitter tears. But all will not necessarily be lost. Christ will still be Lord and Ruler of the wicked man, and Christ is eternally the same. The same in His pitifulness and love; the same in His hatred of evil; the same in His everlasting desire that no man should perish, 'but that all should come unto Him and live.'

But I do not say that, therefore, no one will perish.

I do not believe in Universalism. Scripture seems to me clearly to indicate a different termination of things, and to teach that there are those who here destroy themselves, and for whom there is therefore no hope in the future. These are the persons spoken of in the last verse of the prophet Isaiah, who shall, on the 'new earth,' be 'an abhorring unto all flesh,' and whose 'carcases' shall form a lasting memorial of the loath-someness of sin; for 'their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched' (Isa, lxvi. 24).

I do not myself see how it can be otherwise, if man is to be regarded as, in any sense, a free agent. The probability that some will be finally lost, whatever that may imply, seems to be an inevitable conclusion from the very nature of intelligent existence, and of human responsibility. But it ill becomes us to conclude that these will be 'the many,' or that when Christ rejoices over the thousands of the redeemed, Satan and his hosts will respond with boasts of the tens of thousands they have for ever ruined. It cannot be so if, 'as sin has abounded grace shall much more abound.'

Of course it will be said, that the supposed possibility of a sinner's restoration after death, is not to be found in any distinct text or other plain declaration in the inspired writings, and it will be affirmed that what is not to be found *there* in this unmistakeable form, ought not to be received as true. But all this goes upon a most mistaken idea both of the structure of Scripture and of the purposes for which it was given.

Scripture was not given to inform us of all that God intends to do with the human race, nor yet in any respect to reveal to us the secret counsels of His will. The supposition that it does give us this information, arises from the book being read through the medium of human creeds, or under the influences of public preaching and popular religious literature.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLAN OF SALVATION.

It may startle many, but it is nevertheless true, that Scripture no where brings before us a plan or scheme of salvation. What is called 'the Plan of Salvation' is not of God, but of man. It is a human construction, consisting simply of inferences, more or less truthfully, and more or less erroneously drawn from Scripture, but not to be found as a whole, any where in Scripture.

In speaking thus of 'the Plan,' I am not referring to any given formula in which it is embodied, but to the complete form in which it is now so frequently and so earnestly pressed upon the attention of the ungodly. To prevent misconception as to what is meant, it may be well to show from printed documents how it is commonly presented.

The Rev. James Gall, a well-known Free Church Minister in Edinburgh, thus addresses the sinner—"I now offer you immediate reconciliation, the pardon of all your sins and a new nature that will enable you to lead a new life; in short, I offer you instant salvation through Jesus Christ, the moment you accept his offer. He does not require you to do anything for your own salvation, for he knows that you can do nothing. The Lord of Glory became a man, taking the form of a servant, to obey God's law for us, and to suffer the punishment of our sins. He bore the torments of God's wrath in the garden of Gethsemane, and shed his blood on the cross to make an atonement for sin. The justice of God being thus satisfied, he rose from the dead, and sent forth his disciples into all the world to preach the Gospel. . . As when the woman touched the garment of Jesus, and virtue came out of him and cured her, so the sinner, the moment he accepts of Christ as his Saviour, receives the Holy Spirit from the person of Christ. At that moment the sinner is born again, receiving a new life and a new nature; and as the Spirit of Jesus ever afterwards dwells in him, he becomes one with Christ, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Christ being the head, and he being one of the members, they are so united that God's justice cannot separate or distinguish them, for when justice looks on the sinner, he sees Jesus there, and is well satisfied."1

^{1&}quot;Instant Salvation by the Instant acceptance of a Mediator and Surety." By the Rev. Jas. Gall.

This is, without question, the doctrine that lies at the root of nearly all modern Evangelistic appeals, and no one can deny that the teaching is clear, simple and attractive to multitudes. But where is it to be found in Scripture, as thus presented? Where are we taught in the Book that men may, by faith, leap, as it were, at once into the highest glory, however dark or inconsistent their course may have long been? Principles, it has been well said, do not reach their development at The piety and devotedness of those who hold them oftentimes keep them in check, so far as individual or personal character is concerned. But it is scarcely possible for any thoughtful person not to be alarmed, when almost everybody is endeavouring to make it appear that conversion is one of the easiest things it is possible to conceive of; when Faith is preached as if it operated like an oriental talisman; and when reward according to works, and blessings which belong only to those who 'endure unto the end,' are all but universally ignored.

But I am not here concerned with abuse of the doctrine; for the fact that teaching of any kind has been perverted and misapplied, is no argument against its truth. I am disputing its accordance with Scripture in any form. I am insisting that it is, from first to last, a merely human construction; a plan erroneously

deduced from Scripture; a perversion of certain truths addressed to believers only; and as now offered to men, in the hope and belief that by presentation to the world at large, in a systematic, logical, and somewhat philosophic form, it may be made powerful to the pulling down of the strongholds of Sin and Satan, it is untrue. I am simply maintaining that for any man to insist that such statements are Revelations of God-divine facts, when they are in reality only the inferences of fallible mortals, is to mislead men; while to stand by them merely because they are "old paths," rejecting every form of new light which God may vouchsafe to man, if it is not to be found explicitly stated in the Bible in so many words, is, to say the least of it, utterly unreasonable. It is in fact to deny the progressive character of Scripture; to deny that its truths are unrolled as the ages advance; it is to deny that while Divine Revelation is itself unchanging, the understanding of it by mortals depends on the amount of light God may give us, and on our freedom from the bias of prejudice, interest and worldliness.

The fact is, no so-called 'Plan of Salvation' can be found, or *ought to be expected*, in Scripture. Such a production would be foreign to the design of the sacred writers. Paul, in declaring to Timothy, the purposes for which Scripture was given, fails to enumerate this end among the rest. He says 'all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' His teaching always is that the Bible is intended to act on character, to form the character of the believer. No where is it supposed to reveal to man the secret counsels of God, or to give us any kind of formula by the acceptance of which we are to be saved. This is not the sense in which, either in the Old Testament or in the New, the word of God is 'a light to our feet,' or 'a lamp to our path.'

I am not afraid to say that, great and glorious as is the truth, that all our moral and spiritual strength is in Christ—that of ourselves we can do nothing—that separated from the one living and true Vine, the best of men speedily become dead branches, and bring forth no fruit; while I say, no one holds this more firmly than I do, I am not afraid to say—for alas! experience has proved it—that if, when first received into the soul, the doctrine of Sanctification in Christ is life, and health, and joy, to a spirit burdened by sin, and weary of vain and fruitless attempts to overcome it, this same doctrine is very apt to become, in process of time, the parent of a sort of passive Antinomianism, under the influence of which men, however

zealous in promoting the good of others, become lethargic in the spiritual warfare; lean on Christ, but fail to put forth the power He is ready to impart; lean on Christ, but shrink from self-denial; honour the Master, but fail to tread in His footsteps, whenever so doing seems to involve injury to worldly interests, or the obligation to live above the conventional standard of the day.

Never should it be forgotten that Divine Truth, as given to man, is always truth in solution, not Truth crystallized and hardened. It is man that crystallizes it, and never rests in his endeavours to give to it what he calls consistency, in order that he may get out of it what he regards as saving formulas. The process is a fatal one. So far as it effects anything, it but converts the fountain of living waters into icicles, beautiful it may be, to look upon, but cold and no longer lifegiving. The firmness and fixity thought to be attained, is but the binding together by the cold human intellect, in everlasting frost, not precious things alone, but whatever substance—hay or straw—may at the time be floating on the surface of public opinion.

¹ For positive evidence in favour of the views I hold relative to pardon after death, I can only refer the reader to a book that has been before the world now for above twelve years—"The Destiny of the Human Race;" a Scriptural Inquiry, by Henry Dunn. A new and revised edition, in crown 8vo., 6s., is now published by Simpkin, Marshall & Co.

CHAPTER IV.

REVIVALIST THEOLOGY.

THE recent proceedings of American Evangelists, the attention they have excited, the crowds they have gathered, the impression they have produced, and the apparent good they have effected, has forced their proceedings into a prominence which makes it almost essential to examine, somewhat narrowly, the theology on which the whole movement is based. This is the more necessary because that theology, although doubtless exaggerated by revival preachers, is substantially and essentially the theology of the Evangelical body throughout England and America—I might almost say throughout the world.

One evidence of this is, that it is by no means unusual to hear ministers of repute insist that "the Gospel we all value as priceless, rests entirely on the truth or falsehood of the old orthodox doctrine of Eternal Punishment;" that "if that doctrine goes, Christianity, as taught in English pulpits, will soon follow;" that "if

this fearful alternative of unbelief is doulted, the atonement becomes needless;" and that "in short, everything must be changed."

Revivalists always act on this supposition. Mr. Moody is reported to have said, "I believe in the old-fashioned hell. If I did not believe in hell for ever, I would not come here to preach night after night." This is plain speaking; and its importance, as showing the basis on which all his proceedings rest, can scarcely be overrated.

That he like others starts with the notion that in consequence of Adam's fall, the race of mankindevery member of it—comes into the world subject to a death which is interpreted as meaning eternal sensitive misery in hell, no one doubts. But may we not ask-Scripture being recognised as the only court of appeal, is this doctrine true? Where, for instance, is our authority for reading the warning to Adam, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' as if it implied, 'I will put thee to death as a criminal,' when its real meaning probably was, 'In the day that thou eatest, dying thou shalt die,' since death is the inevitable consequence of disobedience? who can doubt that the death announced was like another portion of the sentence, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' a blessing in disquise? The prediction that by the seed of the woman should deliverance be effected, must have opened up to Adam and Eve the prospect of retrieval from their ruined state. "They saw that God had not abandoned them, and that His thoughts towards them were thoughts of compassion even whilst He was pronouncing sentence upon them. They saw God was even then planning their return, and that His love was even then preparing the means of accomplishing it. In whatever way the promise might be accomplished they would see that its chief value lay in this, that it was a demonstration and a pledge of God's love."

The fall, when it took place, was obviously not unexpected, since it was both foreseen and provided for. We have a right therefore to suppose—God being infinitely wise and good—that it was permitted for wise and good ends, and further that all it has entailed on the human race will one day be seen to issue in results consonant with the highest interests of the creature, and exemplifying infinite wisdom, justice, love, and truth.

Much that was involved in the transaction may be, and probably is, at present beyond our reach, but it is not difficult to see that without acquaintance with evil there could scarcely be any such thing as an intelligent and voluntary preference for good. That which had to

be formed in the newly created being was what we call character, but character cannot be called into existence like light, or indeed have any being apart from the will of the creature to be acted upon. The fall, therefore, whatever might be its consequences, was but the first and necessary step in the education of humanity. I say of humanity, because throughout, Adam is never regarded as an individual, but always as the head and first father of a race.

And how many consequences follow! Expelled from the cradle and the home of his earliest days, man is sent forth to do his work, to develop his powers, to discover their limitations, to labour, to suffer, to sicken, and to die. And all this under apparently hard conditions. The very earth resists its tiller and brings forth thorns and thistles. The animal creation rebels against its appointed ruler, and must be subdued, so far as it can be subdued, by superior cunning or by brute force. Sadness intermingles with every joy, and henceforth, from the cradle to the grave, life becomes a fight.

We have next to observe the human being, as he is multiplied by fresh births, and grows from infancy to manhood under the conditions which now belong to the race. What these were we have already seen, so far, at least, as they involve change of circumstances; that they carry with them a change of nature has been often

asserted, and is without much consideration commonly assumed.

The phrase is an unhappy one. What we call human depravity—a depraved nature, means neither more nor less than this, the consequences which must invariably follow the separation of the creature from his Creator. Placed in that position—and Adam was so placed by his disobedience,—any created being would become depraved. The change that took place in our first parents after their fall was not therefore a change of nature, but simply the development of their independence. It was the necessary consequence of being left to themselves.

This was the only difference betwixt Adam and Cain. Adam, before his transgression, was in close alliance with his Maker. Cain comes into existence when that alliance was broken. Christ, the second Adam, renews through Himself the broken tie whenever and wherever the lesson taught by the separation has been perfectly learnt, but not before. Depravity, or the tendency to fall into evil to any conceivable extent, is therefore natural in every human being when 'drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.' Holiness, or the disposition to submit everything to the infinitely wise and good, is, on the contrary, supernatural, being the result of influences from above.

Whether, under such conditions, a man shall become a murderer like Cain, or a saint like Abel, whether he shall turn out a man of progress, like Nimrod the mighty hunter, or a preacher of righteousness like Noah, will depend on a variety of influences, the exact force and bearing of which we cannot fully Temperament, temptation, the developunderstand. ment of passion, will all have their influence; but more than all, and above all, will the character be swayed by a disposition to despise or to seek after that Divine help in time of need which, given from above, alone overcomes the power of evil, and fashions mortals into the image of God. In any and in every case a wise although often mysterious education is being carried But nowhere can there be found anything like evidence that in consequence of Adam's sin his descendants come into the world under the wrath, or exposed to the eternal indignation of their Creator. This notion is, from first to last, nothing better than a diseased theological fancy.

Again, I have no wish to be captious, but I am often puzzled in reading revival addresses, to know what can be intended, beyond or different from ordinary speech, by what is said about the blood. The 'blood is the life,' and one would naturally suppose that the phrase, 'Christ shed His blood for us,' means neither more nor less

than this, that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' But this does not seem to satisfy these persons, who talk as if they accepted Roman Catholic doctrine, and attached a mystical value to the material blood that flowed from the Saviour's wounds. What else can be intended by such expressions as these?—"Take the blood out of the Bible, and I would not carry it home. The Lord would not accept Cain's offering because there was no blood in it; God looked at the blood and was satisfied;" with many other such like terms. Surely it is high time that we asked ourselves distinctly what these things mean.

So, again, in relation to the sufferings of the Lord, what right has any man to say that these sufferings were inflicted by God; that He punished the Redeemer for the sins of men; that these pains satisfied Divine justice, and made it possible—which it otherwise would not have been—for God to forgive sin? Nothing of this sort is said in Scripture. These are merely human inferences, drawn, as it is supposed, legitimately, from the statements of Holy Writ, but they have no Divine authority whatever.

Scripture indeed tells us plainly enough that Christ was a Sin-bearer, for, having no sins of His own to suffer for, nor any defects of character needing to be corrected by discipline, all He did and endured was necessarily

vicarious. But as to the precise way in which these sufferings acted on the Divine mind, or affected the penalties of the Divine law, we know nothing.

It may be said that I am forgetting Paul's significant declaration,—'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.' I am doing no such thing. But I am not willing to pervert this striking saying of the apostle, or to make it mean what it does not. What Paul gloried in was not the crucifixion, but the reproach that shameful death involved. He gloried in this because he saw therein the crucifixion of human pride, and because it crucified him to the It was in this, and in this alone, that he gloried. world. The crucifixion points only to the wickedness of man and to the redeeming love of the Saviour. As conqueror over evil and all that it has brought into the world, we believe that it was necessary, although we know not why, that the Lord should endure its worst. That in so doing He overcame its author, and became the restorer to peace and joy of rebellious and ruined humanity, is the great fact on which all our hopes rest.

Finally, one cannot help being struck most forcibly by the circumstance that, so far as Scripture enables us to judge, the methods followed by the apostles in dealing with the unconverted strikingly contrast with our modern modes of proceeding.

In vain shall we search all the accounts we have of St. Paul's labours in order to find a case where any Gentile was bidden, living or dying, in health or in sickness, to look to Christ that he might be saved from hell. In vain shall we search for a single instance in which any one was taught that, by a glance of faith at a once suffering but now glorified Redeemer, his heart would be melted and changed, his character transformed, and he be made a partaker of the Divine life, and a sharer in the joys of heaven. These notions have been grafted on to the message since the death of the apostles.

Where, it may well be asked, in any report of the proceedings of the great apostle to the Gentiles, can we find anything corresponding to the action of modern revivalists? Paul was surrounded by Jews, far enough from righteousness, and by heathen, ignorant alike of God and of all godliness. Where do we find him calling together either the one or the other, in order to tell them that their eternal happiness depended on a change of heart taking place immediately? Where do we find him proclaiming to them that now was their day of salvation; that Christ was now passing by with a deliverance from eternal ruin in His hand, which might never be offered again; that everlasting consequences hung upon their decision?

Above all—for this is really the point at issue, where do

we find him visiting a dying man, Jew or Gentile, who had lived to the last in sin, and saying to him at that solemn hour, that if, then and there, he would look to Jesus, he would be at once cleansed, pardoned, and made 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?' Paul would have said, 'Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth' rather than I should utter such delusive words. He would unquestionably have left such an one in the hands of God, knowing full well that Christ would appoint to every man his proper place in that world on which he was entering, and subject him there to such discipline and training as might best be adapted to his peculiar character and circumstances.

A word or two more must now be added on the view that is taken by revivalists regarding the action of the Holy Spirit; a view which seems to me again strikingly to contrast with the conduct of the apostles. For where do we find any one of them speaking or writing as if he thought that the Holy Spirit—I say it reverently—had subjected Himself to the call of man; comes at human request, to this or that town or individual; waits, in

¹ The case of the jailer, and that of the dying thief on the cross, may, at first sight, seem to contradict these statements, but such is not the fact. In neither of these instances had any invitation or entreaty been brought to bear. These were spontaneous applications for light and Messing, and were met accordingly in the simplest possible form.

fact on human petitions, and thus sanctions the notion that 'prayer.' rather than God, 'rules the world'?

Of course it will be replied that the Holy Spirit inspires the prayer, and therefore is the only living agent in the production of good. But this is mere assumption. Who supposes that *every* petition offered even by good men is inspired by the Spirit? Who does not know that evil influences often stain our supplications? And who can tell that none such have mingled in the instances under notice?

It is a favourite notion with the friends and supporters of modern revivalist movements, that no greater proof can be had that the Spirit of God is with them than the circumstance—which is certainly remarkable that public interest should have been so greatly excited, and such multitudes assembled, when in all their proceedings there was so great an absence of excitement, and so slight a display of either powerful talent or moving oratory. To this it is surely enough to reply that any popular assembly may have about it much that is singular, unexpected, or inexplicable, without its being in any sense supernatural. Nothing can be more hasty or dangerous than for any of us to assume that whatever happens in our religious proceedings that is inexplicable by ourselves must be supernatural in character. No good reason can possibly be found for such a conclusion. I am, however, by no means disposed to allow that the recent marvellous stirring of the people of England by American evangelists is incapable of being accounted for in a natural way; but as any endeavour to do this would only excite anger in the breasts of many, the attempt had better be omitted. Let it suffice then to say of this, as of all such movements, that God may use them without causing them, and that He may grant His blessing on much connected with them, notwithstanding their being largely mixed with what He cannot either sanction or approve.

CHAPTER V.

PURPOSES OF SCRIPTURE.

Q. — For what purpose has Holy Scripture been created and preserved through the ages, if not in order that, by means of its revelations, mankind might be brought to the knowledge and love of the true God, and be made obedient to the faith that is in Christ Jesus?

I am obliged to reply that nothing whatever can be found in Scripture itself to show that the sacred volume was ever intended to act as a converting agent on the world at large. I have already quoted what the apostle Paul says on this head, and shown how he confines its purpose to the perfecting of the Man of God. And this is, without doubt, its great end, the grand object for which it has been created and preserved.

The Bible, as a great fact, is, almost without exception, addressed only to believers. It has much to say about other classes of persons, but not a word, except it be in an historical connection, is addressed to them. Much that the book contains—its facts, its narratives, its

history of the past, its account of the birth and early progress of this world of ours, its plain and practical statements generally, may, if believed, be *informing* to ungodly men, and may, in many other respects, be useful to them. But it is not God's instrument for their conversion. The use of it for that purpose has, more than anything else, tended to lower its character, and to lessen its power over the believer.

All experience goes to prove that the Bible is not intended to convert the world, and the records of all missionary societies confirm this view. It matters not whether we bear the Bible to a savage or to a civilized community; everywhere, and at all times, the truth that is diffused touches the many, but triumphs only over the few. To the one it becomes the parent of a new life; to the other it is merely an enlightener—modifying, it may be, laws, customs and institutions,

The mission to Madagascar certainly seems, at first sight to contradict the statement. But it does not really do this. The Bible there, as everywhere else, has proved the great educator of those who have, through the testimony and sufferings of their brethren been brought to believe on Christ. But there is nothing to shew that the book alone has accomplished the work. The Spirit of God has been the great missionary in Madagascar, since He has been there unhindered by the help of man, and been allowed to act "without let or hindrance" directly on the minds and hearts of these poor and suffering aborigines. The result has been a success unparallelled in the history of missions. The characters of these men as Christians, have been formed by the study of Scripture.

but having little vital effect on the general conduct of the masses.

Confusions innumerable have resulted from the denial of this. The Christian religion has been presented as if it were a narrow system of favouritism, blessing the few. but infinitely adding to the miseries of the many; the eternal condition of every man has been made to hang on his belief or unbelief of truths he may never have understood, and certainly never deliberately rejected; the Bible has been treated as if it were magical in character; regeneration has been regarded as a change that could be wrought by human agencies and outward ordinances: Christianity has been called a failure, because it has not done what it never professed to do; while the teaching of the Saviour, reduced to what has been considered a practicable level, has, to a great extent, lost its power over those for whom it was specially intended, without. in return, acquiring any hold on the multitude, for the sake of gaining whom it has been lowered in tone, and limited in range. Take the following as proof.

In a volume of sermons recently published by an eminent clergyman ' the precept, 'If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also,' is thus dealt with—"Tell," says the preacher, "the man

¹ Sermons by the Rev. Stopford Brooke, M.A. — "Christ in Modern Life."

who has a tendency to fear, that he is to take literally the command regarding non-resistance, and he becomes a coward on principle. Tell the same to another who has military traditions of honour, and he says that Christ's teaching is not fit for practical life." And then the preacher speaks of the words of Christ as being addressed "to the emotions rather than to the understanding," and likens them to "an air of Mozart's, which means one thing to me and another to you, yet leaves on both an indefinite but similar impression—a sense of exquisite melody which soothes life, and inspires an affection for the man who gave us so delicate an emotion."

Another clergyman, a dignitary of the Church of England is still more explicit. In what is, in many respects an admirable series of discourses, he ventures to say, when commenting on the state of Christian society amongst us,—"Here is the New Testament, the confessed source of Christian morality, with its facts and language about which there is no dispute, and with its spirit and tone equally distinct and marked. And, on the other hand, here is the ordinary life of Christian society, with its accepted principles, its familiar habits, its long sanctioned traditions; the life of Christian society, not particularly in this or that age, but as, on

^{&#}x27; Sermons preached before the University of Oxford by the Rev. R. W. Church, M.A., now Dean of St. Paul's.

the whole, it has been from the time when Christianity won its place definitely in the world. When we put the two side by side, the mind must be dull indeed which is not conscious of a strong sense of difference and contrast. The change is not only one of fact, but in the general sense of what is right and lawful in the general view of the conduct of life." On the whole, however, the preacher justifies society, observing, "In all directions we see instances of the necessities of things enforcing an enlarged interpretation of language, and we believe (in relation to the Sermon on the Mount) that the common sense and instinct of Christians have, on the whole, caught its true meaninn."

The laws of Christ are thus lowered, only because it is supposed they were addressed to all men. But this is not the case. These distinguishing precepts of the Lord were addressed, not to men generally, but to a particular class of men; they apply not to those who willingly have their portion in this life, but to those only who elect to live for another; they were never intended to be carried out by nations; for society, as at present constituted, could not exist if the doctrines inculcated in the Sermon on the Mount were acted upon; they appeal exclusively to those who are seeking to lay up treasure in heaven, and whose ambitions lie beyond the present state of existence.

I do not for a moment dispute,—I have indeed asserted,—that much that the Bible contains is, without doubt, common property, and fitted alike for young and old, poor and rich, educated and uninstructed; for no other book contains so many facts with which it is important mankind should be acquainted, and, when devoutly read, no other book is so well adapted to purify the taste, to enlarge the mind, or to improve the heart.

But it is a two-edged sword. Its perusal may be as mischievous to some, as it is advantageous to others; and in its distribution the exhortation of the Lord must be ever kept in mind, 'Be ye wise as serpents, but harmless as doves.'

The very structure of the book indicates this need. It consists of, and embodies, first, the literature of a Divinely chosen and miraculously governed nation; then, inspired records involving at every step supernatural interferences on behalf of given men and given teaching; and finally letters, which from their very nature must sometimes be as incomprehensible to the irreligious as the mystic prophecy with which the whole concludes. What can such a production have to say to a man who disbelieves in the supernatural altogether, and who criticises it chapter by chapter, just as he would any other ancient document?

He may admit much that it contains. He may regard it as largely historical. He may be charmed by its poetry, or fascinated by its simplicity. He may, both intellectually and morally, be the better for such of its teachings as seem to him useful and instructive. Beyond this it can have no value, or rather, only be of value to the extent that the man is morally and spiritually prepared for its examination; yet Christians generally regard the sacred volume as intended to be the chief means of the world's conversion, and they scatter it broadcast with that view.

I fear that in our desire for extension, in our admiration of magnificent plans and gigantic combinations, we have in this matter sadly neglected the Saviour's wise teaching; that we have been far too mechanical and indiscriminate in our circulation of the Scriptures; far too ready to imagine that the mere multiplication of copies by the printing press must of necessity advance the Redeemer's kingdom; that the most thoughtless or unwilling perusal of a Bible is likely to be accompanied by a Divine blessing; perhaps more than half disposed to believe that because the word of God is to the Christian 'the sword of the Spirit,' searching the very thoughts and intents of the heart, therefore it must be to every man 'the candle of the Lord.'

But is it so? Have we not evidence to the contrary? Have we not but too much reason to believe that casting, as we have so largely done, this pearl of great price before men quite unprepared to estimate its value, the result has been precisely what the Lord has led us to expect—the rising up of a school, numbering among its disciples not only the great majority of the active and cultivated intellects of the age, but nearly the whole body of skilled artisans—the masses of modern society, -- which only turns again and 'rends us;' rends us by criticism, appropriate enough from the unbelieving standpoint of those who issue it, but only a thorn in the side of those who see by another light; rends us by contrasting our so-called Christian nations, and their conventional morality, with the sermon on the mount; rends us by insinuating doubts which, apart from supernatural influence, can never be dispelled; rends us by separating the morality of the Bible from its Divinity; rends us by lowering its entire tone and teaching to the standard of what is called practical life; rends us by making the revelation a thing of earth rather than of heaven,-a record which may be improved or expurgated, accepted or rejected in whole or in part, according as it may be found to agree with human intuitions, or accord with human aims and ends.

As in the days when Jesus was on earth, so now, and for the same reasons, hidden though they be in great measure from us, the Lord of light and love sees.

it best to say, regarding the many, 'Unto them that are without, all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand.' The word withheld, because it would be abused, is doubtless kept back in love; and the mere fact that Divine Truth always has been—in every age as now—placed absolutely beyond the reach of the far greater part of the inhabitants of the earth, might alone help us to understand the many intimations of Scripture which point to a great future restoration, and encourage us to hope that in other worlds, and under happier auspices, apparently lost myriads will eventually be brought home on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. At present the law is, 'To him that hath shall be given; and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.'

If we accept this view of the Divine dealings we shall cease to wonder, as we so often do with half-disguised dissatisfaction, that a written revelation has for so many ages been given to some and practically withheld from others; that even to those who in common possess it externally, it should be by no means the same book: that to one it seems full of light, and to another dark and inexplicable; that to one man it should be 'profitable for reproof and for correction in righteousness, and to another but a stumblingblock; that by it 'the man of God' should be made 'perfect to every good

word and work,' and that by it also the scorner should be hardened in his scorning, and the profane stimulated to increased profanity. So true is it that the Bible, like everything else, is to each of us what we are to it; that to the flippant, the sceptical, and the prejudiced, the Divine oracle is dumb; that 'to the froward it shows itself froward.'

Should these observations appear to be, as to many they probably will, very strange, that circumstance must be attributed to prevailing disregard of Scriptural thought. Christians generally, I fear, have come to believe that work and not meditation is their duty. Perverting the text, 'He that watereth others shall be watered also himself;' and omitting to notice that it really means that he who liberally helps others in the day of their calamity shall be helped by them when trouble falls upon himself, the most intelligent Christians habitually apply it to spiritual things, and conclude from it that if they appropriate their spare time to active service in the work of the Church, they will reap therefrom more advantage than they could expect to gain from solitary thought, or from the careful and independent study of the The consequence is, they almost all act with-Bible. out much reflection, work in teams, and adopt both readily and willingly the opinions of the particular religious body with which they may happen to be connected.

CHAPTER VI.

SCRIPTURE PROMISES.

Q.—'What mean the promises, scattered through the inspired writings, of the coming of a glorious time when the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, if that day will never come?'

The answer to this question may be brief, but it must be decided. No believer in Scripture doubts for a moment that the day of triumph will come, or that every promise of God will be in the largest sense fulfilled. The only question is, When and how, will that fulfilment be brought about?

The passages referred to must not be separated from their context. They can only be rightly explained in connection therewith. By the pious Jew it is clear they must have been understood as referring to the time of Messiah's triumph, the great theme of all Hebrew prophecy. And surely it is needless to say that this great event is more than once associated with the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of fallen humanity. Why such passages should ever have received

¹ Isa. xix. 24—25; xxv. 8, comp. 1 Cor. xv. 54; Ezek. xvi. 55.

the interpretation which applies them to the Christian dispensation would be inexplicable, were it not so constantly seen that Divines who, from whatever circumstance, have committed themselves to a given explanation of Scripture, are seldom scrupulous as to the means by which they support their interpretations. And this is especially true when the Interpreter happens to be a man of popular influence or of high reputation.

Having first proclaimed to the world that the living God is pledged to the fulfilment of their expectations, they naturally say the thing must be, whatever difficulties it may seem to involve, since the Omnipotent knows nothing of obstacles, and is perfectly able at any moment to bring all mankind into obedience to His Son. As if any one doubted the power of God, or as if the admission of that power altered the fact that, although it were true that from the foundation of the world God might at any moment have converted the world to righteousness, He has for wise and good reasons never exercised that power, and, from all that we know of His moral government, never will.

May we not have gone too far in allowing that God could, if such were His pleasure, convert the world at once by the exercise of power? The supposition that He could do this without a violation either of His own moral attributes, or of the freedom and responsibility of

man, has led to a kind of vague expectation that some day He will pour out His Holy Spirit upon the world in such abundance (a form of Divine power), that all at once, or nearly so, the moral and spiritual condition of men will be changed, and that thus will be brought about the fulfilment of prophecy, the moral desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose.

I do not think we are right in admitting the possibility of this. For in so doing we seem to call in question the wisdom of God in allowing, as He has done for ages, the same result to be produced only by processes so painful as are those that have hitherto been deemed necessary to form a holy character. Will not reflection lead us to conclude that, as has been already observed, from its very nature, character must to some extent be self-formed?—that the great object of God in the creation and discipline of man is to bring about the free and voluntary choice by the creature of all that is good and God-like? Has not the apostle Paul indicated this when he calls upon us to work out our own 'salvation,' that is—our deliverance from evil—'with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure'? The apparently absolute control of God over both inclination and action, instead of being made, as one might have expected, a reason for our being passive in the matter, is urged upon us as the motive for co-operation in the accomplishment of the object to be attained.

Why, then, should we allow ourselves to imagine that it will ever be otherwise? and if it will not, why should we suppose that in the latter day anything will take place essentially different from what is now taking place, or that the great principles on which God has hitherto proceeded will be changed?

The 'pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh' does not imply this; the reference of Peter to the prophecy of Joel evidently shows that the gift there spoken of was one of endowment, investing those who should partake of it with gifts similar to that of tongues. Let us, then, learn to be Scriptural in our expectations, in which case we may rest assured not only that every promise of God will be fulfilled, but that the fulfilment whenever it comes, will be 'far more abundant than we can either ask or think.'

¹ I reject 'Universalism' simply because it assumes that in some cases, and in the last resort, God will destroy the freedom of the human will. I reject the notion that any great outpouring of the spirit in the latter day will overcome evil, for the very same reason. Any one thus acted upon would lose the grand distinction of humanity, and be cut off from manhood. No such work will, therefore, be accomplished, either in this or in any other world. Human responsibility implies freedom, as certainly as regeneration implies supernatural interference. The problem involved in the inquiry, 'How can these statements be reconciled?' God only can solve; but it is neither greater nor different from many others that meet us every day in life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES.

Q.—'Why, if Christians are not absolutely responsible for the souls of others, did our Lord and His apostles teach as they did?'

I had here better say at once that, to my mind, no portion of the Bible has been more misconceived or perverted than our Lord's teaching when on earth has been. I have already said much on the lowering process to which the Sermon on the Mount has been subjected, and on the causes which have led to so lamentable a process. I must now refer to some other portions of the Saviour's not unfrequent discourse.

And here I may observe that we have just been told that "if we have any conception of our work, or any communion with our Master, we shall feel that we poorly represent it, and wholly fail in resemblance to Him, unless we plead with men. The voice tremulous with earnestness, persistent in entreaty, is at its softest and most winning cadences but a poor echo of His."

I am obliged to confess my inability to find in the

discourses of Christ anything corresponding to these words. He does not seem to me to be anywhere pleading with the unconverted, or ever to be 'persistent in entreaty,' with or for them. His words are,—whatever they may imply,—'I pray not for the world;' and again, 'I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world.' 'I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am.'

Speaking generally, it may be said, the Lord for the most part addressed Himself only to His disciples; nor does He commonly act otherwise, even when the multitude gather round Him before He has finished His discourse to His immediate followers. The crowds that so frequently followed Christ were, as He himself tells us, moved not by His teaching, but by His miracles; whether they consisted of the healing of the sick or the feeding of the hungry.

That He sympathized deeply with the great masses of His countrymen no one can doubt. He mourned over Jerusalem with a bitter sorrow; that He did so in contemplating not the spiritual condition of thepeople but the miseries that were about to fall on the nation, is evident from what He said to the Jewish women when on the way to crucifixion.

He conversed with the woman of Samaria, but it is

impossible to connect that calm discourse with either pleading or persistent entreaty. He frequently preached in the synagogues, but always very calmly; the subject being on all occasions essentially the same, 'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' He went through all Galilee, 'teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.' He calls the Jews 'the children of the kingdom.'

The Pharisees He scarcely ever addressed, except in the language of denunciation. Both to them and to the multitude He ordinarily spoke only in parables, expounding His sayings to the disciples alone; the exceptions to this course are rare. The reason given for veiling the truth from those who were not prepared to receive it is, 'that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted,' at that time. And yet 'the common people heard Him gladly.' Love evidently was underlying all His proceedings, although they were not marked by emotion, nor did they always indicate what He felt. Wherever His word was received it was received readily, for such we are told were ordained (or set in order) to eternal life. Wherever it was rejected no further pains were The hardened were left in the hands of God. taken.

Paul, on this account, I think, not unfrequently addresses all his converts as "Elect" (see 2 Thess. ii. 13; 2 Tim. i. 9; Eph. i. 4-6.)

A 'plenteous harvest' of souls is promised, and 'labourers' are called for, but the reason given is, not that the harvest may be secured, but that the labourers may be benefited (John iv. 36). The people to be thus finally gathered in are persons to whom it is not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The labourers are enlightened, and are supposed to understand the true position of all parties.

When the Lord says, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,' He is speaking of a particular order of persons—of a class in Judea who were scorned by the self-righteous, but were not below the Saviour's notice. He came but to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' He was anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor and broken-hearted, to the captives and to the blind; that is to all such who might be found among the chosen people; but nowhere, either for them or for any others, does He use the language of persistent entreaty, or plead with men in relation to their eternal interests.

It must not, moreover, be unnoticed that the word 'sinners' was used in Judea in a very different sense from that which it has among ourselves. The sinner among the Jews was a person out of harmony with the Mosaic economy; one who was living an immoral life, or who had in some other way violated the national

The division then existing was sense of right. between those who accepted and those who rejected Christ as the Messiah. The Pharisees generally, and many other prominent religious professors belonged to the rejecting party; but no one would therefore have spoken of them as 'sinners.' Our Lord seems to have thought better of the outcasts than He did of the Pharisaical party; for His sympathies were always with the despised of the people. He speaks of such as being nearer the Kingdom of heaven than were the leaders of the religious world of that day. But it is remarkable that He never classes either the one or the other with those whom He says God had given Him out of the world; nor does He ever exhibit that sort of anxiety regarding the spiritual condition of any person which commonly finds expression either in emotion or in entreaty. sharply rebukes the prevailing hypocrisy of the day. but He leaves the hypocrites themselves, like all others, in the hands of God.

When he says to the Jews, 'Ye will not come to me that ye might have life,' the words imply rather a declaration of their state of mind than an entreaty to come. His mournful utterance over Jerusalem (Matt. xxiii. 37—39) is, in like manner, but a melancholy denunciation of folly and impenitence.

The condemnation incurred by those who wilfully neglected or despised the Saviour was then what it is

now—the loss for ever of all the blessings belief would have secured; the loss of whatever may be included in the terms 'glory and honour,' with exclusion from 'the kingdom of heaven.'

In dealing with the question, What, according to the New Testament, was the leading character of our Lord's teaching? I am obliged to reply, The one and exclusive subject of the Lord's discourse, if regarded in its essence and spirit, was that which for eighteen hundred years has been, and still is, systematically ignored, evaded, or denied by the Christian Church, viz:—His second advent and His everlasting kingdom.

Nothing can be clearer than that the only Gospel taught by our Lord himself when on earth, is the good news of 'the Kingdom.' The sole object of His public ministry among the Jews was to enlighten the minds of the chosen people regarding that Divine kingdom for which they were so eagerly looking; to point out to them its true nature; to exhibit and illustrate the moral and spiritual characteristics of those who were to share its glory. This was the beginning and end of Christ's teaching to the Jews. Nor was the case otherwise when He was privately instructing His disciples. The Sermon on the Mount, the strait gate, the narrow way, the marriage supper, the closed door, the new birth,— everything, in short, taught to them points in this direction.

The conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus confirms this view of things. He tells him that except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God; and when the ruler stumbles at the doctrine, He adds, 'Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?' implying that He spoke of things which were already revealed.

And what were the things Nicodemus ought to have known? What were the truths he was thus expected to be acquainted with? Not, as we are constantly told, that 'except a man be born again,' he cannot escape eternal ruin; for Nicodemus could not know that. since, if true, it had never been revealed. Ezekiel had indeed said to the Jews, 'Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' but a careful examination of the context will show that the prophet is speaking of something different from what we understand by the new birth, since the death to which he refers is temporal death, incurred by infractions of the ceremonial law. What our Lord really taught. and what Nicodemus ought to have understood was neither more nor less than what had been previously made known by Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Micah, viz., that when Jehovah should gather Israel in the

day of restoration, God would 'take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and would give them a heart of flesh' (Jer. xxxi. 33); that then all their children should be taught of God; and that with this great event should be associated the removal of 'the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations;' that then shall 'death be swallowed up in victory' (Isa. xxv. 8). It is needless to say that Paul connects this text with the resurrection. Further, the Lord would never have told Nicodemus that the doctrine in question was one with which he ought to have been acquainted, had He not meant by it precisely what the prophets meant when they spoke regarding it.

The message to those whom Christ, by the apostles, subsequently called out of the Gentile world, was not essentially different from that delivered to the Jews. The Gentiles were to be told they were no longer outcasts and aliens,—'strangers to the covenants of promise'; that God now bade them come to Him as children; that He placed them spiritually on the same level as the Jews; that He invited them to share 'the Kingdom' without passing through Judaism, or being burdened in any way by the rites of the Mosaic economy. This is evident from what Paul says to the Ephesians. He tells them that the mystery of Christ made known

to him 'by revelation'—a mystery till then 'hid in God from the beginning of the world,' was not merely that the Gentiles might be saved, or brought within the Christian dispensation, but that they 'should be fellow heirs (with the Jews), and of the same body, and partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel' (Eph. iii. 6). This was to the Gentile 'the unsearchable riches of Christ,'—the kingdom was thrown open to them.

That this announcement further involved the good tidings of redemption for the heathen world, a redemption actually effected and completed by the Lord himself, and therefore not dependent for its efficacy on its reception or rejection by mortals, is certain. It was a declaration of deliverance for all men from the sway of Satan; a deliverance actually effected for the whole world; it was a deliverance openly proclaimed, and altogether irrevocable; it carried with it life after death, but a life the character of which, like that of the present, would necessarily be dependent on conduct; a life that could only be a blessed one if spent in conformity with the will of God, in penitence on account of past sin, and in faith on the Redeemer.

Such was the general message to the Gentile nations. Beyond and behind this was 'a high calling' to 'glory and honour;' a call to present salvation from evil, and to immediate fellowship with God through

Christ; a blessing to be enjoyed only by those who, here renewed in the spirit of their minds, are 'born again, not of the will of man, but of God.'

Hence neither the apostles nor their converts exhibit the anxiety and distress relative to the unconverted which, on the supposition that modern views are true, would certainly have been manifested. If Paul ceased not 'by the space of three years to warn every man day and night with tears,' his grief was not for the lost heathen by whom he was surrounded, but for the Ephesian church so soon to be desolated by 'grievous wolves, not sparing the flock.' If he was willing to be 'anathema,' it was only for his brethren who were casting away their privileges. If for some he endured a second travail, it was not that such might be saved from hell, but that they might make their calling and election sure. He, indeed, never uses the term 'salvation' in the negative sense it so often assumes, when men are warned to escape an infinitely fearful doom. The 'great salvation,' in his esteem, found its entire value in its positive aspect,—in the inestimable wealth that it offered to men. Christ, he well knew, had bequeathed untold riches to all who would accept them. and therefore to him "the expunged ordinance of man's condemnation was converted into the title-deed of an eternal inheritance." These tidings, taught to Jews,

waiting, amid whatever misapprehension, for Messiah, and to Greeks, wearied with the vain philosophy of the schools, was the sum and substance of apostolic teaching.

Finally, nothing whatever can be found in the recorded words either of our Lord or of His apostles, which indicates that the kind of responsibility for the salvation of others which we assume, was either felt by the first Christians or enforced by the Master. Not a sentence can be drawn from the sayings either of Christ or of His immediate followers which can honestly be made to support the notion that we shall have to account for the ungodly, except under limitations which, as we proceed, will have to be clearly set forth.

CHAPTER VIII.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

Q. 'Is it possible to deny that the doctrine of Eternal punishment is fatal to any hope or expectation that the condition of an unrenewed man can be either amended or altered after death?'

I CERTAINLY feel, and therefore willingly admit, that the doctrine of eternal punishment, as it has been all but universally held in the Church for ages, is fatal to any hope or expectation that the condition of an unrenewed man can be either amended or altered after death. We are therefore at once driven upon the inquiry,—Is that doctrine true, Scripture being the only court of appeal?

So much has of late been written on this subject, that it would be but a waste both of time and space here to enter at any length into the reasons that have weighed against the doctrine in the minds of many Christian men. Let it suffice, then, simply to notice the leading texts which are usually quoted in its

support. I trust these will be examined candidly and fearlessly, for it is well to have clearly before our minds the importance of the question, and to see how much it involves.

The passages commonly supposed to prove the orthodox doctrine are the following:—

(1) Psa. ix. 17: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.'

OBS. The word here translated 'hell' (sheol) really means 'the grave, or the invisible world.' It is the same word which Jonah uses when in the belly of the fish he speaks of himself as in the belly of 'hell.' It is the same word that Jacob uses when he says that his grey hairs will go down with sorrow to 'the grave.' The meaning of the text, therefore, is that God will cut off the wicked from the earth.

(2) Psa xi 6: 'Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.'

Obs. This passage is kindred to the preceding one, and like it, refers only to the judgments of God upon the wicked in this world. (Compare Job xviii. 8, 11, 15.)

(3) Eccles. xi. 3: 'In the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be,'—a passage frequently quoted to prove that no change in our moral condition can take place after death.

OBS. The slightest reference to the context will show that the words in question have no relation whatever to the eternal destiny of any man.

(4) Isa. xxxiii. 14: 'The sinners in Zion are afraid; fear-fulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?'

OBS. The reply given to the inquiry in the following verse might alone suffice to show that the prophet is not referring to future punishment; since the answer is, 'He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly.' Matthew Henry says, and very justly, that the fires referred to were those occasioned by Assyrian invaders.

(5) Ezek. iii. 19: 'If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

OBS. The death here referred to is temporal death, inflicted for infractions of the law of Moses. This is evident from the parallel passage in chap. xxxiii. 9, which is followed by the declaration that 'if the wicked restore the pledge, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live' (v. 15, 16).

(6) Dan. xii. 2: 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.'

Obs. This passage is parallel to Isa. lxvi. 24. 'They

shall look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, nor their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.' 'Contempt' and 'abhorring' evidently mean the same thing. The action of 'the worm' and of 'the fire' is on dead 'carcases,' not on the living soul. The figure indicates the loathsomeness of sin, here regarded as weltering in its own corruption.

(7) Matt. v. 22: 'Whosoever shall say (to his brother), Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.'

OBS. 'Gehenna,' or hell, here evidently stands for capital punishment on earth, since in the context it is classed with the minor sentences passed by 'the judgment' (the court of the twenty-three), and by 'the council' (the Sanhedrim). The word 'Gehenna' literally signifies 'the Valley of Hinnom,' where the dead bodies of criminals were from time to time thrown. To call an Israelite $\mu\omega\rho\sigma_{\mathcal{C}}$, 'fool,' or rather 'apostate' (see Alford), was by the Jewish law a capital offence, and subjected the offender to a punishment called being 'thrust down into hell, or tossed into Gehenna.'—(Quoted from the Talmud, by Lightfoot and Schoetgen, and by Robinson in 'Evangelists and the Mishna.')

(8) Matt. xxv. 46: 'And these shall go away into everlasting punishment.'

OBS. No argument can be safely based upon the word here translated 'everlasting,' since every one admits that it (a(w)) is variously used in Scripture; it sometimes indicates limitation, and denotes an age (Matt xiii. 22); sometimes it expresses a state or period beyond time, as it does in the text now under notice. But, properly speaking, nothing can be 'eternal' which has had a beginning. Further, it is, to say the least of it, highly probable that as the words 'inherit the kingdom' (used in xxv. 34) are equivalent to 'life eternal' (ver. 46), 'everlasting punishment' stands for perpetual exclusion from the blessedness of those on the right hand.

It may also be remarked that the word translated 'punishment' is not $\tau\iota\mu\omega\rho\iota\alpha$, which expresses the vindictive character of the infliction as satisfying violated law; but $\kappa\dot{\epsilon}\lambda\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$, which has reference to the correction and bettering of him that endures it. (See Archbishop Trench's 'Synonyms of the New Testament,' p. 23.) The theologian, however, overrides the scholar, and says that we must not apply these remarks to the New Testament. Why?

(9) Mark ix. 47, 48: 'It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.'

Obs. This passage differs from one already noticed (Matt. v. 22—30), inasmuch as it clearly refers to punishment in the world to come. The words used by our Lord are a quotation from Isaiah (lxvi. 24). There, as we have seen, they are applied to 'carcases,' and Jesus, who

quotes them to people familiar with the words of the prophet, does not give even a hint that a different interpretation is to be given to them. To say, as so many do, that the 'undying worm' stands for eternal remorse, and the 'unquenchable fire' for unending torture, either in material or figurative flame, is to contradict Scripture, and to put our own fancies in the place of revealed truth. Fire, when spoken of as being 'unquenchable,' is always regarded as being so only until the purpose is answered for which it was lighted up (Lev. vi. 13; 2 Kings xxii. 17; Isa. xxxiv. 10; Ezek. xx. 47, 48).

(10) Mark ix. 49, 50: 'For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.'

OBS. As these words immediately follow what had been said about 'the worm' and the 'unquenchable fire,' some have supposed them to mean that the wicked shall be kept alive for ever in torture. This interpretation is a diseased fancy. Richard Baxter considers, and rightly, that the fire intended is that of 'affliction on earth.' The reference seems to be to 'the meat offering' which was by the law required to be salted (Lev. ii. 13). The meaning is, Every one that enters 'the kingdom of God' (ver. 47) shall be salted with fire, i.e., purified by discipline; and every sacrifice that is well pleasing to God must be 'salted with salt,' i.e., seasoned with grace to render it acceptable (Col. iv. 6.)

(11) Luke xvi. 23: 'And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.'

OBS. The parable in which these words are found was not spoken in order to reveal heaven and hell to the Pharisees, but to enforce a practical duty,—that of love to the brethren. The place of punishment is not hell (Gehenna), but Hades, that world of separate spirits which is one day to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. xx. 13, 14). imagery is obviously figurative. The 'bosom of Abraham' simply implies a state of rest and peace. The rich man, apparently distressed by internal fever, asks for water to cool his 'tongue.' We simply learn from the parable that the soul of man at death passes into what is usually termed 'the separate state; 'that there it begins to reap what it has sown on earth—the righteous tranquil repose, the foretaste of better things to come; the wicked pain and sorrow, the fruit of their own devices. With the question of eternal punishment the text has nothing to do.

(12) John iii. 36: 'The wrath of God abideth on him,'—words which are supposed to imply abideth for ever.

Obs. The abiding can only mean while unbelief continues, or no man, once an unbeliever, could have any hope of deliverance. This text simply asserts what is here undisputed, that while abiding in sin and unbelief no man can be blessed.

(13) 2 Cor. v. 11: 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.'

Obs. This text, it is often said, clearly implies that Paul preached the terrors of hell, and that he urged these terrors as a motive to repentance. The apostle does not really refer to the *terror* of the Lord at all. The word is wrongly translated, being the same word that Paul uses a little further on in the passage, 'perfecting holiness in the *fear* of God' (vii. 1). Dean Alford interprets the text thus:—'Being conscious of the fear of the Lord, we are free from double-dealing.' Whether translated 'fear' or 'terror,' the word in question $(\phi \circ \beta \circ \nu)$ applies to the apostle himself, not to his hearers.

(14) Jude 7: 'Even as Sodom and Gomorrha are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.'

OBS. Ezekiel assures us Sodom shall be given to Israel, 'though not by covenant.' The punishment inflicted cannot therefore be irremediable. The words evidently refer to the total destruction of the city. Babylon the Great is by a similar figure spoken of in the Apocalypse as 'tormented' (Rev. xviii. 7, 15).

(15) Rev. xxii. 11: 'He that is unjust let him be unjust still; he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.'

OBS. These words no more imply that he who is unjust must ever be so, than they involve a charge to the wicked to continue in wickedness. As Alford observes, "there is a solemn irony in them, and the lesson conveyed in its depth is, change without delay." They are like the words of our Lord to His disciples, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand' (Matt. xxvi. 45). A similar expression is found in Ezekiel (iii. 27; xx. 39).

The foregoing are, I believe, the texts that are most commonly brought forward to justify that tremendous dogma, THE ETERNITY OF EVIL and the ENDLESSNESS OF SUFFERING. And surely it may now fairly be asked, What weight have they as evidence of the truth of the dogma when honestly examined? (1)

(1) Those who are acquainted with a little book of mine entitled 'Organized Christianity: Is it of God or of Man?' published about ten years ago, by Simpkin and Marshall, and recently reprinted, can scarcely fail to observe that several paragraphs therein have been transferred to the present volume without marks of quotation. I have done this advisedly for reasons which it is not necessary to state. In like manner, this chapter on Eternal Punishment has been taken from the Appendix to 'The Kingdom of God the Kingdom of the Resurrection.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE ASPECT OF THE WORLD.

It has frequently been observed, and not without reason, that the first Christians were much happier in their religion than we are, and this notwithstanding the peculiar trials to which they were exposed. Many reasons have been given to account for their 'gladness,' but the main cause of their habitual joy has rarely if ever been mentioned. They had a much happier theology than we have. The world in which they lived bore to them an aspect very different from what it does to us They lived in constant expectation of the return of the Lord to establish His everlasting kingdom; to raise the dead; to make manifest the sons of God, and by that manifestation, with all that it involved, to heal the sorrows of humanity and to deliver this groaning and troubled earth from its long day of grief and sadness.

It is all very well to tell us, as many do, that whatever may be the condition of the world, we are bound to be glad in the Lord. But how can we be joyful (save with a very selfish joy) so long as we hold that the great mass of our fellow-creatures—some of them very dear to us—are hasting on to an eternity of woe? We are bidden, indeed, to find rest in the assurance that the Divine Being is too wise to err, and too good to do wrong. How can a thoughtful man do this if he is at the same time to believe that God has doomed to an eternity of sensitive misery and endless wickedness, myriads of his brethren and sisters according to the flesh, for living in accordance with the nature they have possessed since their birth; for yielding to the temptations of that mighty evil spirit who is continually practising on their weakness; for not loving and obeying a Saviour of whose goodness multitudes of them have never heard, or if they have heard been morally unable to appreciate?

But why, it is said, thus try to make yourself unhappy? Learn to look on the bright side of things. Surely it is enough to reply,—'That which makes me unhappy is not a fancy, but a fact.' The sin and misery of the world is a sad reality, and cannot be set aside. Nor ought it to be. My duty never can be fulfilled by looking on the bright side of things alone. I am bound to look at everything, but especially at the facts of life, truthfully and on all sides; and when I do so, I am forced to the conclusion that if our theology be Scriptural, the world.

regarded as a whole, has no bright side. It is one dark mass of wickedness now, and, according to our teachers, is destined to be one dark mass of untold wretchedness for ever.

The first Christians had no such view of life, and therefore in contemplating the future no shadow fell upon their present joy; but 'continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.'

How changed the aspect of the whole world would become to us if we were but accustomed to look upon it scripturally! As it is, "shadows, clouds, and darkness" settle over every part of it. To such an extent has this been felt, that some excellent Christian ministers have, in their published writings, expressed a conviction that it would be a blessing if every child died in infancy; while others have doubted whether it is morally right to add to the number of those who seem so certain to live in sin and to be unsaved. But was this the theology of the apostolic age? and if it was not, why was it not? Let us look the only answer that can be given fairly in the face.

To the apostle Paul the world, bad as it was in his day, was no painful mystery, for it was a world redeemed by One 'mighty to save.' He, like the rest of us, had doubtless ungodly relatives and friends; he was certainly surrounded every day by thousands whom he saw yielding to the temptations of the evil one; and he was constantly witnessing the deaths of such persons, deaths 'without God and without hope.' Yet none of these things would appear to have moved or distressed him. They at least excited in his breast no frantic efforts, no incessant prayers for the world's conversion; so far as we can judge by what is recorded, he neither wept nor prayed on their account.

And why? Certainly not because his heart was less tender than ours; certainly not because he cared less than we do either for the glory of God in the conversion of sinners, or for the spiritual good of those who were round about him, but simply because he looked to the end; because he saw further than we do; because he believed in the return of Christ, when the 'vail should be removed from the face of all nations; and because till then his whole care and interest, although not confined to any class, was centred like his Master's in the elect,—the elect nation of which he was a part, and the elect people who of God were now being called out of the Gentile world to take the place of those who had been set aside. These he found received the word 'with readiness,' being 'ordained to eternal life.'

It is for his brethren and kinsmen after the flesh, and for them only, that he feels as if he could be himself cast off were it only possible thereby to awaken them to a sense of the value of the birthright they had despised. It is for his Gentile converts only that he trembles, moved by the deepest anxiety lest they should fail in the warfare, and so fall short of the kingdom.

Were he on earth now, he would lift up his hands with grief and astonishment as he beheld the course of Christians; and he would proclaim, as with a voice of thunder, the certainty that ere long God would arise in loving judgment, and sweep away almost all in which we pride ourselves as fruits of faith and piety.

And if it be asked Why should God do this? wherein have we offended? the reply is but too plain. In our eagerness to exalt ourselves, to undertake spiritual enterprises, to persuade ourselves that the conversion of the world to Christ is made dependent on our zeal and fidelity, on our money and ministries, we have denied or despised the second advent of the Lord; we have refused to admit that His kingdom can be anything different from that of which we are the leaders; or that anything can be more spiritual, or redound more to the glory of the Redeemer than our multiplication of religious professors, organized as they are in innumerable sects, and each, in turn, by a sort of holy rivalry urging on each other to the conquest of the world.

CHAPTER X.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

But it will be said, What is this kingdom of which you speak so much, and to the recognition of which you attach so much importance? I reply, it is the kingdom spoken of by Moses, by Zechariah, by Hosea, by Ezekiel, and by Daniel. It is, as an outward and objective reality, to commence at the second advent of the Redeemer. It is a kingdom existing now only in mystery, as a thing yet to be fully revealed. It is already the believer's, just in the same sense, and only in the sense that eternal life is his present possession. It will most probably be established on this earth of ours when purified by the last conflagration. It is to be manifested at the resurrection of the Its rulers and teachers (kings and priests unto dead. Christ) are to be the elite of the universe, the best and wisest of all ages. Its subjects, whatever may be their condition, or whatever their employments, will be the myriads who have been redeemed by Jesus from the power of Satan, and brought by Him while on earth, whatever may have been their apparent wretchedness, under that precise course of training and development which He has appointed for them.

The education thus commenced, however elementary it may be in form, will be there carried forward under far more favourable auspices. Then, too, will every human being reap as he has sown: some, rest and peace; some, sorrow, toil, and dissatisfaction—the evil things which they escaped on earth. The ruling body—the royal priesthood—will without doubt inhabit the new Jerusalem, of which 'the Lamb is the light thereof,' and where all joys congregate. The rest will dwell outside that city (nations of the saved) but receiving both instruction and guidance from those that dwell within, for 'the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations.'

All this, however, in the present day—let it be for a lamentation—is, even among the best, extensively denied. Christians do not shrink from saying in reference to the second advent of the Lord, 'Where is the promise of His coming'? so that were He to return immediately, it might well be said, 'Shall He find faith (in His advent) on the earth'? Some of the most popular and widely read publications of the religious world do not scruple to say (no one blaming them for the view,

or even expressing dissidence) that because our Lord, when speaking of the characteristics of the kingdom to the Pharisees, who thought of it only as a kingdom of earthly ambition and pride, said to them 'The kingdom of God is within,' (or rather, as the margin, among) you—for the King was then present in person,—we ought to believe that the kingdom itself is purely a subjective thing; that it consists "in a right state of mind;" that it is simply Christ dwelling in the hearts of men by His Holy Spirit; that it is amongst us now, and that it will be seen in its fulness when the triumphs of the Gospel shall be universal.

Alas! these are the teachings of a generation distinguished above all other generations by its ignorance of Scripture; a generation essentially 'earthy' in its thoughts, whatever it may be in its affections; a generation in which teachers and taught alike recognise little else than what they have received by tradition from their fathers; a generation, therefore, still dwelling, in spite of all its advantages, under the shadow of Antichrist, and more or less involved in the 'mystery of iniquity.'

What can be more sad than to find, as we do, in the most widely circulated of all our religious periodicals such sentiments as these—"Christ's own disciples yielded more or less to the temptation that the king-

dom of heaven was a kingdom lying beyond the grave; they always looked for a kingdom in which Christ was to be visible King, and in which they were to have visible honours,—a kingdom in the distance, a kingdom in the future." As if Christ ever taught anything else; as if He had not again and again indicated the position and duties of those who were to share the kingdom; as if He had not spoken of it as a compensation for earthly suffering, and a reward for eminent service. (Matt. v. 10; Luke xviii. 29—30; Rev. xi. 15—18.)

Such statements are unhappily but a true and simple reflex of Christian public opinion such as it is,—confused, unscriptural, excited, ignorant of Christ's teaching, and filled with false expectations.

On this ignorance and falsity Christendom has been built up. From the death of the apostles and the passing away of the Jewish dispensation to this hour Christians as a whole, the holiest and the best, have to a great extent lived a false life; have mistaken the Gospel; have taught error in place of truth; and have reaped as their reward a state of things which no eye but that of God can pierce, and no wisdom but that of God can correct and purify.

The error—the *mistake*, if it may be called by so gentle a name, has been precisely that to which I have adverted. It has been the making, from the end of the first century downwards, the Kingdom of heaven, a kingdom of this world; sometimes by insisting, as the Romanist (and not the Romanist alone) does, that his church is the kingdom of Christ; sometimes by maintaining the same doctrine when applied to all churches; sometimes by associating the kingdom, or rather identifying it, with the advancement of piety in the world; always in one form or other, denying that it is future, or associated in Scripture with the resurrection, the second advent of Christ, and the great restoration by which that event is to be accompanied.

Men can scarcely take any other view so long as they hold that earth is the theatre of the world's conversion; that only those who believe on Christ here can be saved; that every man's eternal destiny is fixed when he dies. If this be true, what room is there for a future kingdom? what end is it to answer? what peculiarity could such a reign have that could distinguish it from that of the eternal Father?

CHAPTER XI.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

I AM desirous in this chapter to draw attention to the relation in which, according to Scripture, the crucified Redeemer now stands, first, to the world at large considered as a whole, and then to the believer and the unbeliever as such.

The relation of Christ to the world, regarded as a unity, and irrespective of spiritual distinctions is very plainly laid down in the New Testament. It may be summed up in one text, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them (2 Cor. v. 19.) Other declarations, such as that of John the Baptist, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world,' or that of the Lord Himself, 'the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world,' with many others, all express the same thought, viz., that in consequence of the death of Christ, God has pardoned the world; 'He will not impute their trespasses

unto them.' It is needless to say that 'the world' in these passages means all men, or that it includes every individual that either has had, or will have life on this earth of ours. To give the words any other interpretation is simply to render them unintelligible.

The question then arises, In what sense are all men pardoned? (For I have already repudiated universalism, and have expressed my belief that Scripture leads us to suppose that *some* at least, will be lost for ever). If God, in consequence of Christ's death, will not impute the trespasses of men unto them, what is their present standing before Him?

The answer to such a question must be explicit or it cannot be the true one. What then does this pardon include? Certainly not the removal or remission of all the consequences of sin; for men, whether penitent or impenitent, suffer,—and often very severely too,—for their past transgressions, whether committed in youth or in riper age, and no one can dispute that 'after death,' all men will stand before God in judgment, and every one receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. How, it will be said, can it be made out that facts like these are consistent with pardon?

The difficulty, if it be one, arises from our considering the pardon of God to be the same thing as the pardon of man. But it is not so. It is something different and far greater than the pardon of a criminal by any earthly ruler. The pardons of earth simply remit the penalty that has been incurred by the transgressor, for they can do no more. They cannot restore the offender, if he has been guilty, either to himself or to society. They cannot take away from him the consciousness of degradation, nor can they give him the confidence and love of his fellow men. These, once lost, cannot be regained by any act of mercy on the part of a human tribunal. The man himself is unchanged, and being morally the same is naturally excluded.

It is otherwise with the pardon of God. This,—heavenly and not earthly in character,—does not indeed remove all the penal consequences of sin, but it does far more. It removes every barrier on the part of God, to the complete reconciliation of the sinner to Himself; to the transgressor becoming a part of the mystical body of Christ; to his being made a partaker of glory and honour. This, and nothing less, is the position of every man, so far as God is concerned, whether the transgressor himself be sensible of it or not.

From penalty, so far as it arises out of sin, or is suffered in the form of pain, sickness, or death, Christ does not deliver any man. So far as penalty is disciplinary He sanctifies it. So far as it necessarily involves

retribution here or hereafter He does not interfere with it; for Christ's death "did not dissolve the connection between sin and suffering, the righteousness of that connection remaining unchanged." We may speak therefore with the strictest Scriptural propriety of this world of ours being a pardoned world, without implying thereby anything inconsistent with God's hatred of evil, or any belief that no man can ultimately perish.

But is this declaration of pardon sufficient? all that a sinner needs in order to be restored to spiritual health and happiness? Clearly not. He needs the removal of the moral stain caused by sin. He needs a change of character, without which the fulness of blessing implied in pardon cannot be enjoyed. And this can be obtained only by that co-operation on the part of the sinner with a pardoning God without which no man, so long as he is a free moral agent, can possibly be benefited. Pardon, when believed in leads to this. It may be very mysterious, but it is nevertheless true, that the more God works in a man by loving-kindness, the stronger that man becomes in himself. Grace acts morally, not mechanically, so that holiness cannot exist without freedom; for, as it has been well put, "without the conscience, without freedom, without will, without the act of the person, nothing is done in the kingdom of spirit."

We now go on to inquire, In what way the death of Christ affects the believer and the unbeliever regarded as such.

By the believer I mean the man who truly bears that character,—the man who believes 'with the heart unto righteousness.' I understand by the term, simply and alone, one who by a living faith is united to Christ; for I have nothing to do here with a multitude who may either think themselves or call themselves believers, but whose hearts are untouched by Divine love. The question put is simply this, 'What is Christ to the man who by a living faith is united to Him?'

The answer must be 'all in all.' Christ is everything to the believer. He is to such a man 'the end of the law for righteousness,' since he is 'justified freely by His grace.' Christ is made of God to him 'wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.' Christ is to him 'the power of God, and the wisdom of God,' for his faith stands not 'in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.' Language, in short, fails to express the innumerable and eternal benefits the believer receives from the Redeemer.

But what is Christ to the unbeliever? In what relation does He stand to the man who either knows nothing of Him, or else deliberately rejects His mediation?

I reply that to the first class (those who know Him not)—a class which includes the great majority of mankind, viz., the myriads of heathen who never heard His name; the multitudes, whether savage or civilized, who are brought up from childhood in ungodliness, ignorance, and sin; as well as other multitudes who die either in infancy or in idiocy—to these Christ is not less a Saviour because the blessings of that salvation are left to be revealed in other states of existence, where alone fitness for whatever position it may please God to allot them can be gained.

The second class,—those who, in countries like our own, whether moral or immoral, live and die in carelessness and sin,—are in a different position, a position varying with almost every individual; in some, involving the very height of wickedness, in others, an amount of guilt which only God can estimate, but in all implying alienation from the holiest and the best, a heart full of selfishness, and a will corrupted and perverse. What we want to know is, in what relation Christ stands to these, and how He ought to be presented to such persons by the believer.

It is no uncommon thing to hear these ungodly ones told that Christ is waiting to bless them; that He is standing with outstretched arms entreating them to come to Him; that He is in fact pleading with them day and night, filled by a Divine anxiety to save them from eternal ruin. But how are such statements justified from Scripture? Not certainly by that often quoted passage in the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, 'How long, ye simple ones, will' ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.'

Solomon, by a bold personification has, in these words, strikingly and truthfully pourtrayed the claims of Divine wisdom, and the retributive consequences of neglecting and despising her offers; but a neglected or rejected Christ is never presented to us in the New Testament 'laughing' at the calamity of sinners when it reaches them, or 'mocking' at their fears in the day of doom. Neither is He there represented as 'crying without,' uttering His voice 'in the street,' or 'stretching out His hand' to a disregarding people.

Is the justification we ask for found then in Christ's words, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest'? That cannot be; for these were addressed not to the careless, but to the

'weary,' not to the light-hearted trifler, but to the 'burdened,' and the 'rest' promised is in connection with obedience, meekness, and humility. 'Take my yoke upon you, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

Finally,—for we can only glance at possibilities,—is the authority wanted, discoverable in the text, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock,' or as the well-known hymn puts it:—

- "Behold a stranger at the door,

 He gently knocks, has knocked before,

 Hath waited long, is waiting still,

 You treat no other friend so ill.
- "Admit him, ere his anger burn,
 His feet departed ne'er return,
 Admit him, or the hour's at hand,
 You'll at his door rejected stand."

Attention to the context of the symbolic book in which the words occur will show that they do not refer to the position which Christ now occupies in relation to the ungodly, but to His near approach when He comes 'without a sin-offering unto salvation.' He has said to Sardis, 'I will come on thee as a thief,' silently and unexpectedly; then to Philadelphia, 'Behold, I come quickly;' finally to Laodicea, 'I stand at the door and knock,' I have come. The passage corresponds to that

in Luke where the Lord is represented as 'returning from the wedding,' and having come, 'knocketh' that they may 'open to Him immediately.' The voice of Christ to the careless sinner is not, 'I stand at the door and knock,' but 'to him that knocketh it shall be opened,' implying that he who would come to Christ must do so voluntarily and with earnest supplication.

The question is in the present day a very serious one for those who desire to follow the instructions of the Master in their endeavours to awaken men to a consciousness of their spiritual needs, 'How should Christ be presented to the careless and ungodly? Should it be as a motive to repentance? or as a remedy for moral incapacity? Ought we to say to such—as we do,—Christ waits and longs for your reception of Him, or Christ alone can answer your cry, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Christ alone can hear the prayer, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.'

For presenting Christ to the sinner as a motive to repentance I know of no scriptural authority whatever, whether that motive take the form of terror, or of love. To the believer the love of Jesus is continually presented as the great, all powerful, all prevailing motive to godliness; but to the careless and unbelieving He is never thus presented. Our fathers dealt much in terror, and mistaking the words

of Paul, which are strangely mistranslated in our authorized version, their favourite text was 'By the terrors of the Lord we persuade men.' Many, now made aware of the gross mistake involved in this application of the text, which really refers to the apostle himself and not at all to the Corinthians, have to a great extent ceased thus to misapply it. Convinced also that terror, however excited, never leads to anything better than a selfish desire to escape punishment, these have substituted the love of Christ as the great motive to penitence and faith. But this course, however good the intention, or however certain it may be that Divine love manifested in redemption ought to win every heart, is an equally mistaken mode of procedure.

The love of Christ 'constrains' a believer to much; it never constrains an unbeliever to anything. The love of Christ is therefore in Scripture never brought before the sinner as a motive, either to repentance or to anything else; nor is He there even pressed upon the unbeliever as the appointed way of deliverance from eternal death. He is always and only set before him as the sole remedy for moral incapacity. He is the Saviour from sin of all who come to Him feeling the weight of their transgressions. He is the strength of those who, conscious of their weakness, yet long to live above themselves and the world. But He is nowhere

represented as doing anything for men who are unconvinced of the evil of sin, of the eternal beauty of right-eousness, and of the certainty of a judgment to come. The 'Comforter' (or monitor) now represents Him in the world, and what the character of His teaching to the world is, we have already seen.

Nor is it difficult to see why this divine action on mankind at large is limited. For, as Vinet has well expressed it, "While in the sphere of material things, the satisfaction of our wants is the principal thing; in the sphere of Spiritual life the existence of religious wants is the thing to be wished for since their satisfaction has been already provided for, and can never fail." But this satisfaction cannot precede a sense of want, nor can the sense of need be called out by any forcing process on the part of man. It must, in order to be obtained, be voluntarily sought. There must be the will to accept the forgiveness of God with a consciousness of its results, before forgiveness can either give peace with God, or create power to love His holy will; for "wherever there is Christian faith, there is, with the belief of what is true, the desire of what is good, and the choice of what is right."

I know it may be retorted in reply to my assertion, that Christ did not plead with sinners; did not Paul say, 'Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as

though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God!' Doubtless these were his words, but to whom were they addressed? To Corinthian believers, not to the careless They were spoken to men, of whom and unbelieving. but a little before he had said, 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.' We may stumble as we will at believers being bidden to be reconciled to God, but the fact that they were so besought is certain, and the object of such address is declared to be that they might not receive 'the grace of God in vain.' (2 Cor. iii. 3 and v. 20.)

Let no one, then, wilfully perverting what has been said, exclaim in bitter irony, 'Are not sinners, then, to be pointed to Christ? Is the poor wanderer not to be led to the only Saviour of the lost?' Such persons must know that no one disputes the propriety of their being invited to come to the Redeemer. That which has been asserted is, that men must not be led to suppose that Christ waits for them before they feel their need of Him; that they ought not to be addressed in language appropriate only to the believer, while they are yet hardened in unbelief; that it is not possible for

a man to think of Christ aright before he has been made conscious of the evil of sin; that he cannot really avail himself of the Redeemer while he seeks only deliverance from punishment; that the salvation Christ brings is salvation from the power and love of evil. Motives so low and selfish as are those that operate on a man while in unbelief, are never transforming, and no higher or better motives can ever be excited in an unbeliever's mind by human entreaties, or by considerations which involve nothing better than a dread of futurity.

What men really want, in addition to the pardon which removes all obstacles to their salvation on the part of God is, *Holiness*, conformity to the Divine will; Love, proceeding from a consciousness that the pardon granted is itself love to one 'dead in trespasses and sins,' love manifested to an enemy while the enmity exists. But as I have before said, this love to God supposes a change of character, a change which can only be effected by the Spirit of God, calling forth the voluntary co-operation of the sinner; for it can never be too often repeated, a holy character cannot be created except on the condition that man shall work out 'his own salvation,' while, and because, God is working in him 'both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE LIMITATIONS OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

THESE are necessarily determined by the condition of the world and the character of those who are to be acted upon.

The truth is,—and because it is now so commonly denied or ignored it can never be repeated too often,—that, if the statements of Scripture are to be believed, there are always two distinct classes of men in the world, and these are, so to speak, dealt with by God separately. There are those who have a peculiar history, and are subjected to a peculiar discipline; who are at all times led by an unseen hand, and governed by a special providence in a way, and to an extent, altogether different from the experience of others.

These persons are constantly spoken of in the Bible as 'the Elect,' and said to be 'chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world.' Not, however, that they in distinction from others, may be saved from eternal ruin,—as is commonly taught,—but chosen to high and

honourable service; to do work in the world to come, as 'kings and priests' under Christ; work which will bear on the restoration and spiritual education of the myriads who, whether in infancy or idiocy, or in gross ignorance, leave this world without having practically known anything of Christ or of His righteousness. They are the few chosen out of the world now, for the benefit of the many hereafter. The world, however, knoweth them not. They do not always themselves know that they are the privileged. Their true life is a hidden life, hidden 'with God in Christ.' They are the scattered ones, scattered far and wide; having no visible embodiment; represented by no organization; to a great extent invisible to mortal eye.

Yet are they, in an emphatic sense, known to Christ. His eye is always on them. His heart is perpetually yearning after them. His attention,—if such a phrase may be allowed,—is constantly fixed on them. The world, in a certain sense, exists only for them. It is a redeemed world on their account. They are to be in the future its teachers and rulers; for, as Scripture asserts and re-asserts, 'the meek shall inherit the earth.' Nay, more, says He who controls all things,—'He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall (although meek as his Lord) rule them with a rod of

iron: as the vessels of a potter (if they refuse to be governed by love) shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received (similar power and authority) from my Father.'

It is of the responsibilities of these persons to 'a world lying in wickedness' that we have to speak.

And, in doing so, let it first of all be observed, these 'chosen ones' cannot increase their own number by any action on the unconverted. Regarding them as a body, they can only be looked at as consisting of a fixed and determined number of persons, 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world,' and therefore, being such, no human effort can add one to the blessed company. In His own time and way God will call each and all of them out of the world, and so "complete the number of His Elect," but man, who knows them not, cannot do anything to advance or to hasten the process.

I know that many, notwithstanding all that is said in Scripture, absolutely reject the doctrine of Election, not only in the form it has taken when somewhat caricatured by persons called 'High Calvinists,' but in any way whatever. They consider such a doctrine to be nothing better than Fatalism; as if the Heavenly Father was but another word for Fate. This prejudice, however, carries no argument with it. The doctrine of

Election is either in accordance with that revelation of the Divine will which God has made to us in the facts of life, in providence, and in the Bible, or it is not. Whether it be so or no, every man may judge who is not too prejudiced to inquire, too thoughtless to consider, too indolent to search, or too obstinate to be convinced.

Influenced more or less by prejudices of this character, many, when speaking of the dignities connected with the everlasting and glorious inheritance of the holy, say, "These are not special privileges for a few, but a common benefaction for all." The error involved in this statement is a grave one. The supposition that the Kingdom is for all men, or rather acting on that supposition, is extremely dangerous. As I have already said, it lowers 'the high calling' by taking away its exclusive character; while it brings down the standard of righteousness which belongs to the believer, - and which ought to be much higher than that of others is ever likely to become,—to the level of the mass. It makes spiritual Christianity a question rather of popular diffusion, of sympathy, and of appeal, than a supernatural thing. It makes preachers fancy they can 'compel' men to come in by the power of their exhortations; as if the kingdom of God could be taken by the force of eloquence, by entreaty, by alarming address, or by any other form of human action.

The denial of Election is an almost inevitable consequence of the notion that Christianity is essentially aggressive. For if every blessing spoken of in Scripture belongs to all men; if the great work of a Christian on earth is the conversion of the ungodly; if the eternal condition of every man turns on his acceptance or otherwise of Christ here and now, what have we to do with God's purposes? In this case the one and only thing worthy to be thought of is the safety of our neighbour's soul; and no labour can be too great, no means too public, or too indiscriminate, no appeal too pungent or too selfish, no motive too low, and no methods too exciting, that can be made available to arrest the attention of the thoughtless, or to produce a professed faith in Christ as the vicarious sin-bearer, the punished of God in the place of man.

This view of things has, of late, been very largely acted upon, and, according to the testimony of those who have been most engaged in these evangelistic efforts, a signal blessing has been given. Multitudes, it is said, who, before hearing truth thus presented, were either careless or in darkness, have through it, first become distressed about their spiritual condition and then entered into peace and joy. What stronger evidence, it is added, can we have that this mode of presentation is of God than the joy it produces? only

because it is in harmony with the mind of the Holy Spirit is it thus signally supported by Him.

I must be pardoned if I say that to me this joy is no proof whatever that the Divine Spirit has, so to speak, endorsed the utterances referred to. That joy should be all but spontaneously produced when these comforting doctrines are received; when, in the way spoken of, sin is supposed to be forgiven, and the happiness of heaven obtained, need excite no surprise. It is the most natural thing in the world; and the wonder would be if excited satisfaction were not the result of such teaching on a certain class of persons who are sensitive to appeal, affected strongly by the sympathy of others and especially of crowds, generally ill-informed and ignorant of Scripture, and, not unfrequently, somewhat deficient in intellectual power and vigour. But to infer from the fact of this joy being experienced that what has been accomplished must be a work of the Spirit of God, is at best but a hasty assumption. The Romanist invariably draws the same conclusion in relation to the proceedings of his church, since the converts or 'perverts' he may make always experience similar emotions, and are never weary of telling us how happy they have become, and what a proof this happiness is that in submitting to Rome they have done right.

But the question returns,-Under what limitations

are we placed in relation to our fellow men? What, according to Scripture, is the nature and extent of the action of the Spirit of God on the minds and hearts of the unconverted multitude? The answer that must be given to the last of these questions will decide our reply to the first; for it never can be our duty to do more than to follow Divine leading.

In obtaining the information we seek, no difficulty need be found, for Christ himself has told us, in express words, what the action of the Spirit on the world at large really is. 'When He, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth is come, whom the world knoweth not, and whom the world cannot receive, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment to come. Of sin, because (or rather since) they believe not on me. Of righteousness, since I go to the Father and ye see me no more. Of judgment, since the prince of this world is judged.' And, let it here be especially noticed, that the Lord is speaking of what the Comforter (or Monitor) would do for the world after His ascension; when His sacrificial work was finished; when 'the middle wall of partition' was broken down, and the gospel thrown open to all the world.

What under such circumstances would have been our expectation? Why, clearly this,—That the Spirit of the Lord thus sent, would point the whole world to Christ,

would teach them that by looking to Him alone their Nothing of the kind however is, souls could be saved. announced. The knowledge of evil and of good, as these things exist in the mind of God; the difference in His eye, between right and wrong doing, between sin and righteousness, all ending in judgment, is the entire How different is the voice from that which message. we fancy ourselves bound to utter! How marvellously is it in accordance with what St. Paul delivered to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, to the Athenians, and, so far as we have any opportunity of knowing, to unbelievers everywhere! The case of the jailer, as I have already observed, is not in point at all, for he, whatever he might mean by the cry, 'What shall I do to be saved?' was a man earnestly seeking deliverance from what he felt to be a position of great danger, and was therefore naturally pointed to the only Saviour, and to the only salvation worthy of the name.

But how are we to account for this singular with-holding of the good news of Christ's sacrifice, both by God himself when acting as the Comforter, and by the inspired Apostle speaking as his messenger? I see not how it can be accounted for except on the supposition that the judgment of the world will be something very different from what we have generally supposed; that earth is not the only place where Christ's redemption

can be made available; that a class of persons, and not all men, are here training for glory and honour.

That all this harmonizes, both with the facts of life and with the revelations of Scripture regarding the past, is clear. On any other supposition it would be inexplicable, that the knowledge of God was at first apparently confined to the family of Seth; that no provision was made under the Patriarchal dispensation for communicating this knowledge to any one; that the Jews were actually restrained from that kind of intercourse with other nations which would have seemed to us most likely to have diffused Divine truth; and that under the Christian dispensation by far the greater part of mankind have lived and died in utter ignorance that a Saviour had ever been sent into the world.

When I say these revealed statements are collated with the facts of life; with the state of the world as it is, and as it always has been; it seems impossible to suppose that mercy is confined to this world. Who then are we that we should venture to deny, or wish to set all this aside, and undertake to do for men what God has not done for them, and, shall I say it, to improve on the work of the Spirit? Alas! there is but one answer, and that is to be found in the whole history of Ecclesiasticism from the second century until now.

The truth is,—and it is high time it should be recognized,-almost all our views about God or man; about the Divine dealings with humanity; about the nature, extent, and bearing of the sacrifice of Christ; about its influence in satisfying the law of God; and about the possibility, or otherwise, of faith being exercised and sin pardoned after the death of the transgressor, rest, not on plain Scripture statements, but form a part of that huge system of theology,—the work of ages,—according to which everything in heaven and earth is mapped out with wonderful precision, and apparently demonstrated; not however as any other order of thought would be. but by the application of texts in the most arbitrary fashion—texts separated altogether from their contexts, and quoted with a recklessness which, when perceived, is perfectly astounding; frequently in defiance of their natural meaning, and often without regard to anything beyond mere sound.

Centuries have passed since this state of things first came into existence. Since then many generations of men have come and gone; systems, one after another, have been framed, accepted, denied, and disappeared; churches of all possible kinds have sprung up and passed away; sects have risen, flourished, and decayed; everything has changed save the one absorbing, controlling thought of all ages,—Christ

has committed to His believing people the salvation of their fellow men. For this, as time has rolled on, Christians have continued to assert they are bound to live, and if needful to suffer and to die. Why speak then, say they, of the limitations in this respect of Christian responsibility? Love knows no limits. Life is too short to allow us to fulfil half the obligation that rests upon us to save sinners from the burning. Are they not brands to be plucked out of the fire at any cost?

If our theology be Scriptual, they are, and in this case, all that I have written is idle if not mischievous. But I cannot allow the Biblical authority of what we term orthodoxy to be thus assumed. There are too many reasons for supposing the contrary, and too many probabilities, that in accepting it, men have been biassed in their conclusions, to permit us to take for granted that either our Fathers or ourselves have, as yet, honestly examined the matter, without being influenced either by prejudice or interest.

I do not like to attribute inferior and unworthy motives to any one. Especially do I think such imputations unfair in relation to persons who, if thus biassed, frequently are so unconsciously. But it is impossible to forget that not only the great worldly Hierarchies that have afflicted mankind, but also all churches and

sects, down to the very humblest, have always depended for their existence on endeavours to bring men out of the world into their association. Without such a process priestcraft could have no existence; the ministers of sects would have to retire; denominations would cease to exist; persecution would be unknown, for the power of Ecclesiastics would vanish like an evil dream; property would be dissociated from religion; status arising therefrom would be unrecognised: magnificent buildings reared in support of an æsthetic piety would soon become ruins; and in the eyes of all formalists. all hypocritical professors, all persons whose lives consist in a perpetual mingling of things secular with things that are Divine, religion would cease to exist, and the world would in their eyes become purely atheistic.

Whether it would become so in the eye of God is another question. Whether society would become demoralized, manners decay, moral considerations be, to a great extent, disregarded, or the world be in any respect worse than it is, may fairly be questioned. For 'the Comforter' would still be convincing men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come; the elect of God would be living nobler lives than they do now; the Scriptures would be more diligently studied; families would be better taught; the obligation to fulfil the

duties involved in a Priesthood of Home would lessen that greed for gain which now absorbs everything else! Christians would still meet together for Divine worship, 'exhorting one another;' and outsiders would, from time to time, as in Apostolic days, come in, and 'be convinced of all, and be judged of all;' the 'secret of men's hearts' would thus oftentimes 'be made manifest,' and the spectator be led to 'worship God, and to report that God is with Christians of a truth.' Whether this would be so or not, I think it every way desirable that the tremendous issues at stake in the question before us should be fully realized in all their length, and breadth, and vastness.

The immediate consequences of such a return to Apostolic practice I do not pretend to guess. But of this I am quite sure, the ultimate result would be every way beneficial. Not one sinner less would be converted. The line separating the believer from the unbeliever would be broader and clearer; the delusions that now so frequently gather about death-beds, and nestle in every crowded congregation,—delusions that are fostered in families, sustained by ecclesiastics of every name and class, confirmed by a literature almost boundless in extent, embodied, sometimes in books of high pretensions, and more frequently in tracts which are important only from their extended circulation,—

these, all of them, would in process of time disappear; men, called by the Spirit of God, would listen to his voice, and set before their minds the glories of the everlasting Kingdom; while the careless and ungodly, instead of being perplexed as they now are, by the conflicting theories and doubtful disputations which meet them everywhere, would be led to dwell more on the character of moral evil, on the beauty of righteousness, and on the certainty of that judgment which will render to every man according to his works.

The sooner, therefore, this change takes place, although none but God can bring it about, the better will it be both for the world and for the church. For the sooner Christians begin to perceive that their first obligation is to perfect their own characters; to live a manifestly Christian life; and to be felt by all men as different from others, the sooner will 'the mystery of iniquity' come to an end. Then will the great crisis arrive when the final struggle between good and evil will take place in the world; terminating, as it inevitably will, in the second advent of Christ, 'in the manifestation of the Sons of God,' and in the perfect deliverance of a groaning and troubled creation, from the sorrows that have so long weighed it down.

But the question still remains unanswered,—What have Christians, as such, to do in the world? In what

forms are they to represent Christ, so as to become the 'lights of the world,' and the 'salt of the earth?' I shall endeavour to answer this question as plainly and as simply as I can.

I might perhaps be content to do so by observing that all they have to do is to walk in the footsteps of their Master, and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit; but since this reply may be accounted too vague, it will be better to go somewhat into detail.

First of all, then, the Christian, if he would exercise a valuable influence upon the world, must live Christ, by direct and implicit obedience to His commandments; not adapting Divine precepts to the supposed necessities of the time, but compelling the time and all its supposed necessities to bow before the authority of the Lord. This (and I do not except myself from the sweeping condemnation) the Christian world, as I have already shown, is, as yet, far enough from doing.

Next, they have to render to their fellow creatures what have been termed "the dues of Humanity." They must sympathize with the afflicted; they must pity and aid the poor; they must instruct the ignorant, whether young or old; they must, in short, in all things do unto others as they would that others should do unto them. They must live unselfish lives, and, like their Lord, go about doing good. And this, if done properly,

will, as a rule, be done individually, and without the help of organizations or any other machinery;—love to others being the prime mover, and an individual heart brought into contact with another individual heart being the only satisfactory result.

Nor is this all. They must care for men spiritually. as well as physically and morally. In this respect, too, no man has a right to say, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' They must, therefore, while illustrating the gospel by their conduct, make it known, to all who are ignorant of it, in the plainest possible terms; taking care only that they state it correctly, viz., as a call to share in the blessedness of the Kingdom and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; a call, therefore, to give up this world for the next; a call to follow Christ along the path He trod when on earth; a call to make ourselves of no reputation; to be careless of the world's ambitions; to be unbiassed by Christian conventionalities; to walk, in short, in that narrow way, which is the choice of few and the ridicule of most. know of no authority for bidding men come to Christ in any other way, and on any other conditions; or for making Him known to them in any character beyond or beside that of the atoning Redeemer, the source of all moral and spiritual strength, the author and lover of righteousness, the seeker of those who, by His grace.

have imbibed His Spirit, and are prepared to follow Him in self-denial, in weakness, in truthfulness, in humility, and in all virtue.

The 'fulness and freeness' of the gospel does not consist, as we are incessantly told, in the offer of future glory to men who, having lived in sin, are willing, on a bed of death, to profess faith in the Redeemer, but in the applicability of its offers to all without distinction, who accept its conditions. The direction 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,' as that command is now commonly understood amongst us, is thoroughly unscriptural; leading sometimes to delusion, sometimes to perplexity, and generally to serious misconceptions regarding the essential nature of Christianity. Put thus barely, the demand is almost sure to be misunderstood; and faith is but too likely to be regarded as a talisman.

Further, when such teaching is illustrated, as it commonly is, by the looking of the Israelites on the brazen serpent,—an illustration, not used by our Lord as explanatory of faith, but simply of the 'lifting up' of Himself as the Saviour of the world—belief in Christ is almost sure to become a merely mental process; a momentary act of the mind, not only separable, but too often separated, from any change either of heart or purpose. This is not to 'call on the name of the Lord,'

(Acts ii. 21) but to say, 'Lord, Lord,' without departing from iniquity.

The teaching of Scripture is, not, 'Believe that Christ died for you, and you are safe; your guilt is transferred to Him; His righteousness is imputed to you.' But 'Believe what Christ came to teach. Believe on Him, as what He has declared Himself to be—the only Saviour from the love and power of sin.' To say that in the salvation which God has provided, everything is done for us, is simply absurd. Justification is indeed not by works of our own, for nothing we have ever done or can do, merits anything; but 'salvation' must be worked out 'with fear and trembling,' and this because 'it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.'

Distinctions are not therefore destroyed by the assertion that all men are under grace. The only difference is, that He who by the Spirit of God has become convinced 'of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come,' instead of being directed to cry for salvation from hell, will be taught to pray, to struggle, and to hope for deliverance from the power of sin by faith in Christ; and to believe Him when He says that Satan's power is already gone, that the Prince of this world is already 'judged.' It is on the recognition of this great fact that the final award rests. It is because Satan is judged

(dethroned) that God hath appointed a day in which He will judge mankind by the Redeemer.

See, then, the work of the Believer while on earth! It is to a great extent the same in character as was that of his Lord. It is a redeeming work. It is the obligation at all times and at all hazards to promote truth and righteousness; to redeem men from evil of all kinds; to alleviate their distresses; and to bear constant witness in favour of the goodness, the wisdom, and the love of the Father of us all.

Here Christian obligation ends. High excitements and passionate entreaties are neither appointed nor appropriate means for bringing men to Christ. The ungodly are to be won, not worried, as they too often have been to their lasting injury, into a premature profession of piety. Let us beware then lest we irritate men by our impatience to do them good; or, which is worse, in our hearts reproach God for not subduing human hardness. We are in danger of doing both if we imagine that our responsibility is unlimited, and that if men perish their blood will be required at our hands.

A few more remarks on what Christians can or cannot do for the propagation of the faith must form the subject of a distinct chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

DE PROPAGANDA FIDE.

I HAVE said that Christians are bound to make the Gospel known to all who are ignorant of it, taking care only that they present to them the Gospel of Christ, and not merely the gospel of the day. The distinction is an important one, for they are in fact two very different things.

The gospel of the day, or, as it has not untruly been termed, the gospel of the Church, is, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whosoever will may come unto Him and live. It is the proclamation of the 'good news' to sinners that "the sacrifice of Christ is perfectly sufficient, without any additions or conditions at all, for the perfect pardon and acceptance with God of all who will claim their own interest in it. Whosoever does this is saved."

But wicked unwillingness to come to Christ, and to claim an interest in His sacrifice, is the very evil to be met. *Thus* presented, therefore, struggle as we may against the conclusion, the Gospel becomes a message of

grace only to the comparatively few who submit themselves to God; while the great mass of mankind, unsaved in any sense, are left to the consequences of their sin and folly.

For, let it never be forgotten, this Gospel, as generally presented, invariably proceeds on the supposition, that earth is the only theatre of human salvation; that nothing in Scripture justifies us in asserting that the work of Christ can be beneficially brought to bear upon men after death; that the visible church, therefore, whatever may be understood by that term, is the appointed agency by which it pleases God to rescue men from Satan.

Further, if this be the Gospel, might it not be asked in what sense the tidings is 'good news' to men generally? for in all ages, ever since the Creation, or rather ever since the Fall, God has always been more than willing to receive and to forgive the penitent. The sacrifice of Christ unquestionably exhibits more clearly the method of acceptance; it explains to us the mode by which God is at once 'just, and the justifier of the ungodly,' but it does no more. It gives a new reason for the guilty being received and pardoned, but, so far as appears, it does not practically alter the condition of the transgressor, since no one supposes that before the coming of Christ, God rejected those who approached Him, or that until then all mankind were irrecoverably

lost. Surely there must be a serious error somewhere in statements which admit of being thus canvassed.

The Gospel of Christ, the only gospel He ever preached when on earth, is 'the Gospel of the Kingdom;' a gospel that is indeed 'good news' to all men, since it carries with it both privilege and pardon,—privilege for some, and pardon for all; although in neither case does it supersede or interfere with that righteous 'judgment to come' which will allot to every man according to his deeds.

If it be said, what is this pardon for all of which you speak? I reply, the pardon is that which the apostle Paul tells us of, when he says 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them' (2 Cor. v. 19). It is expressed by Isaiah when he represents God as saying to Israel, 'Fear not; for I have redeemed thee. I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me.' It is the declaration that while we were yet sinners,—'enemies to God by wicked works.' Christ died for us. It is one, however, the fulness of which, and its effects on character, can only be entered into when forgiveness is believed in,-when it is realized by faith and estimated by the light of It is one, the consciousness of which is inheaven. tended to fill the breast of the recipient with grateful

love to God, not for mere deliverance from penalty, but for the gifts and promises which disarm penalty of its terrors.

This gospel,—again I say the only one Christ ever taught when He was on earth,—is indeed 'good news' to all men, for it is 'glad tidings of great joy' for the race. It is the declaration that redemption is an accomplished fact. It is the announcement both of the certainty and nearness of the time when all men shall own and adore the Redeemer. It is the joyful and confident anticipation of the day when the mystery of God shall be 'finished,' and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed. It is therefore at once life-giving and ennobling. It is, as the apostle says, 'the gospel of the grace of God,' and 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.'

It is such because it is God's spiritual medicine for the removal of sin; for men are not pardoned on account of their belief, or as a reward thereof, but sanctified by belief in the pardon, which sanctification is salvation. Pardon is, therefore, a means to an end; that end being the introduction of the love of God and of holiness into the heart of the pardoned. There is no limitation in the pardon, but there is much in the belief of the pardon. All are pardoned, but believers are 'a little flock.'

Pardon becomes thus medicinal when believed in, because its object and tendency is to remove the aversion or indifference to God which is the misery of man, to rekindle love, and to do away with fear by inspiring confidence. And this not because pardon implies indifference on the part of God to right and wrong in His creatures, but because it indicates the Divine desire to remove every obstacle to the reconciliation of man to Himself. This reconciliation, accomplished only by Christ, is, with its accompaniment, viz., a provision, by the election of the few for the spiritual advancement of the many in the world to come, 'a new thing in the earth;' it was unknown even to prophets and holy men of old; it was unrevealed before the advent of the Redeemer

The privileges granted to 'the elect' must from their very nature be valued by them chiefly for the benefits that, through their possession, the privileged will be permitted to convey to others in the high and honourable service under Christ to which they are called. They are such as, even in anticipation, cause the heart of the believer to beat with an unselfish joy, and inspire him with the highest and holiest of ambitions.

The difficulties which by many may be supposed to surround the doctrine of universal pardon, such as, 'If sin is already pardoned, why continue to ask pardon of God day by day?' or, 'What; on this showing, is the condition of those who, although pardoned, will not believe it, or do not care to notice it?' or, 'How, if pardoned, can men come into judgment?' I say, all such questions apply with equal force to the popular doctrine that by faith in Christ men obtain the remission of sins,—that they are pardoned in consequence of their faith. For, in either case it is needful to pray that the feet may be cleansed from the pollution acquired day by day in the world; and in either case it is certain that every man will stand before God in judgment. a rejecter of mercy here, the pardon of the sinner may indeed be revoked (Matt. xviii. 35), or, possibly—for who can measure the lovingkindness of the Lord?—the hard heart may in other states of existence open to a just appreciation of the love of God in giving His Son, and so be melted and changed.

It is this 'Gospel' which, says our Lord, 'shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come' (Matt. xxiv. 14). It is this Gospel which the apostles were bidden to convey 'to every creature' (lit., to all creation).

¹ Peter's call to the Jews to be baptized for the remission of sins, obviously means that they should be baptized into the truth or doctrine, that sins were forgiven only in the name of Christ,—that they should be made consible of God's pardoning love in the Redeemer.

They were no longer to confine its proclamation to Judea, as they had hitherto done by His command, but to make known the glad tidings to all the world. For it was the revelation of Divine love to all, announcing a propitiation for all sin, and a promise to destroy all the works of the devil,—all the sin and misery which he has introduced. And so it comes to pass that Christ is at once the head of His mystical body, and yet at the same time the propitiation for the sins of the world.

To suppose, as most persons do, that the direction 'Preach the Gospel to every creature,' implies the possibility of its being presented to every child of Adam, is simply absurd. If that were the Lord's meaning, how is it possible that Paul could have said to the Colossians that the Gospel they had heard had then been preached 'in all the world,' and 'to every creature which is under heaven'? (Col. i. 6, 23); or, repeating the same statement to the Romans, that the sound (of the preachers of the Gospel) 'went into all the earth,' and their words unto the end of the world' (Rom. x. 18). The meaning of the charge plainly is,' Preach the Gospel,—which has hitherto been confined

^{&#}x27; He means not merely is being preached, but has been actually, as an accomplished fact, preached. (So Dr. Brown and Dr. Faussett.)

to Israel,—among all nations; for the promise is not to the Jew only, but 'to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call' (Acts ii. 39).

When, therefore, I say that Christians are bound to present 'the Gospel' to all who are ignorant of it, I mean only and exclusively the 'Gospel of Christ,' which is that of the Kingdom, and which consists in the proclamation of universal pardon, and in the invitation given to the believer to share in the highest blessedness of the Lord. The Gospel, thus presented, may be expected, as in apostolic times, to be readily and joyfully accepted by those for whom it is intended. Those who reject and despise it must be left in the hands of God; pleading, or persistent entreaty to receive the offer, would be quite out of place. The narrowing of the message by the denial of its universality, however good may be the intention, can only tend to lessen the glory of Christ. For as 'the bride of the Lamb' is the Church, and not the solitary nun, however holy she may be; so the crown of Christ is not the saintly jewels that adorn the diadem, but redeemed humanity. 'He shall have the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession.'

What is now called 'preaching the Gospel,' viz., the calling on all men to come to Christ, to believe on Christ, and to trust in Christ, and the endeavour to support

this call week after week, and year after year, by every form of persistent entreaty, is nowhere sanctioned in Scripture. It all goes on the mistaken idea that by this means we can save men's souls from eternal ruin, and that if Christ be professedly accepted, spiritual union with Him follows, and safety and all virtue are secured.

Our duty to the great mass of the ungodly is not one that can be performed after this fashion. What we ought to do for them is, to act in harmony with the Spirit of God, and endeavour to awaken their attention to the evil of sin, to the beauty and blessedness of righteousness, and to the certainty of a judgment to come.

That men, duly impressed with these considerations, will feel their want of a Saviour is certain, for 'the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.' But the approach to Him will then be a very different one from that which arises from dread of future punishment. It will be a cry to the One who alone can redeem from evil, strengthen weakness, or enable the seeker after righteousness to endure unto the end. It will follow a newly awakened desire to perfect manhood in the person of Jesus the anointed One; to rise above self; and to reach that maturity which God designed in our creation, but which can only be secured either here,

or in any other world, through the Redeemer. For goodness, purity, and holiness cannot be *rooted* in any man save in Christ, much less can it grow and mature in any other way or by any other means.

In an earlier chapter I have thought it right to refer with disapprobation to the doctrine of 'instant salvation,' as it is too often presented. But I am by no means prepared to deny that conversion, so far as it can be recognised by man, is often sudden. "Our religious education may be slow and insensible; the most (apparently) sudden conversions have doubtless been prepared, as is the bursting forth of a tree in spring, by the hidden working of the sap under the bark; but when an understood gospel speaks to the heart it does not say, 'Be converted gradually, or even speedily, but at once. There is nothing to be done first, no preparatory step whatever. Christ calls us 'to-day' as immediately and as simply as when He said to the publican, 'Follow Me.' Every feeling that would bring us to His feet immediately is of God; every feeling that would make us wait a day in order to be better prepared is a temptation and a snare."

Far be it then from me to deny that in preaching the Gospel we may hope to accomplish *much*; for the endeavour thus to benefit our fellows belongs to the sphere in which man's agency is called for. It belongs to the sphere of the natural as distin-

guished from that of the supernatural; to a sphere with which man has much to do, as distinguished from one with which he cannot intermeddle. It is the sphere in which that yearning of the renewed soul after the spiritual welfare of others, which God has implanted in every new-born spirit, is fully met. It is the sphere in which evangelists legitimately move. It is the sphere the very existence of which implies that there are many conditions of spiritual existence besides absolute union with Christ on the one hand, or utter abandonment to evil on the other. It proceeds on the assumption that every step upward is a gain to him who makes it; that the lowest step, if in advance, may prepare a man for that which is beyond, and may be as much a proof of God's grace in degree as regeneration itself.

Many work in this sphere without knowing it. Modern revivalists commonly do so. Hence they do good, although not of the kind they think. They arouse attention to Divine things; they excite emotion; they produce in many temporary, and in some permanent impressions of a spiritual character; but they do not, as they think they do, help in the regeneration of the spirits of men, or accomplish anything which, as they fancy, God has inseparably associated therewith.

No small amount of inconsistency, as it appears to

me, arises from either not thinking at all, or thinking inaccurately regarding distinctions between that which is supernatural in the production of spiritual change, and that which is natural.

To think aright on this subject it is necessary to remember that, as in nature, so in grace, a distinction is to be drawn between a direct act of creation, and those natural processes by means of which God continues to create through the ages. In the first instance God spake and it was done, and at His bidding the newly formed world was clothed with verdure and beauty; grass, fruits, and flowers, the whole vegetable creation, burst into existence without the intervention of any agency whatever.

After this first great act, other modes of operation come in; the earth in various forms brings forth fruit apparently of itself, and kind propagates kind, under conditions which afford room for the agency of man, and allow him not only to modify and greatly improve almost any vegetable production by suitable culture, but, by appropriate arrangements to vary the breed of almost any animal that is devoted to his service. He cannot give life to a single blade of grass, but He can, so to speak, stamp the results of his experience alike on tree and flower, on bird and beast.

Now what is true of natural life is true also of

ordinary spiritual life, which, although in every instance a Divine gift, is also made subject to laws under which it may be modified and the man be all but re-made. Given suitable operations in husbandry, and the hills will wave with corn. Withhold those operations, or conduct them unskilfully, and the harvest will be meagre or altogether wanting. Given a well-regulated household or school, faithfully taught and wisely governed, and as surely will there be a spiritual harvest. proportioned to the skill of the sower and to the care bestowed upon the spiritual seed. If all has been rightly done the harvest will be plentiful; if otherwise, it will be scanty or absent. As a rule, the one result is as sure as the other, and so far the parallel between the natural and spiritual harvest is exact.

In each case possibilities must be allowed for, which introduce elements altogether beyond human control; elements which, although different in kind, alike forbid in either department any positive calculations as to what will be obtained in reward of toil. The labours of the husbandman may all be rendered of none avail by floods, or drought, by mildew or insect, or by one of a thousand unexpected and uncontrollable calamities. The labours of the parent or the teacher may, in like manner, prove fruitless by reason of spiritual blights, or prevailing tendencies of an evil kind, which act, no one

knows how, through that mysterious and perilous freedom of the will by which confirmed resistance to that which is good becomes possible. But in neither the one case nor the other is the rule—that success may be expected in proportion to well-directed effort—set aside or materially impaired. The fact that the natural and the spiritual husbandman have alike to learn—often by painful experience—how helpless is man if unaided by God, how entirely dependent he is on a power higher than his own, was never intended to make any difference, either in the constancy of his endeavours or the character of his expectations.

Let it be observed, however, that what I am saying relates exclusively to that department in the spiritual world in which alone man is permitted to act, and more or less to exercise control. That department I have said includes all influences exercised by parents over children, or by teachers over their scholars, whether children or adults; in short, by human beings over one another, whether through the affections, by authority, or by example.

This is not the field of the supernatural, except in the sense in which everything is supernatural. It is not the sphere in which what we call 'Divine sovereignty' comes in. It belongs not to the domain of the miraculous, properly so called, but to the domain of law.

If it were otherwise it would be no fit theatre for human effort. It is the educational region; involving, it is true, issues of tremendous importance in relation both to the imparter and the receiver, but issues which are nevertheless limited; for, once more, I insist that no man's eternal destiny is made to hang on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness, the teaching or the neglect to teach, of his fellow-man. That is a question between God and each individual soul exclusively, and by no means depends either on the place of a man's birth, the character of his education, the advantages he may have enjoyed, or on any set of circumstances by which he may have been surrounded while in this world.

All these circumstances in a man's condition, varying as they do almost indefinitely, are, in their appointed order, agencies in the formation by God of particular classes of character, and have, without question, an important bearing on the position and prospects of the man who is subjected to them. But they cannot decide the question of his future lot, simply because they cannot regenerate him, or do more than act upon his nature either as preparatory to higher influence, or as supplementary thereto by fostering growth in goodness.

The facts of life bear witness to the truthfulness of this view of things. From generation to generation the great mass of religious profession which exists amongst us—let it be worth what it may—is hereditary. Every Protestant sect in existence is sustained in being, not by new converts, but by the adherence of persons descended in natural succession from those who originally formed it.

If therefore it be said, 'What is the value of any spiritual work which does not involve regeneration?' the reply must be, its value is very great, bearing not only on the usefulness and happiness of its recipient here, but also on the position he will occupy in the world to come. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,'—that is, delivered from self and sin and final condemnation,—is a true message to every man; but belief may be a very different thing with different men, and it may therefore involve very different results; the 'called' and the 'chosen' are not the same, for 'many are called, but few are chosen.'

In earthly races many run, but only few gain prizes. In the heavenly race it is the same. Into 'the strait gate,'—the way to the highest, many shall strive to enter, but shall not be able. Those who do enter will come from the east and the west, and will sit down in the kingdom, while others, apparently highly favoured ones, will be shut out. 'The first shall be last, and the last first.' 'To sit on My right hand and on My left,'

said the Saviour, 'is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to those for whom it has been prepared of My Father.'

These sayings do not, however, relate to ordinary salvation from eternal ruin. Of this it is said, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out;' and again, 'Come unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' But there is a specialty also. God is 'the Saviour of all men,' but 'specially of them that believe,' in that higher sense which implies actual union to Christ. For, as the late Edward Bickersteth has well said, 'there are a thousand stages and variations of union with Christ distinguishable from the glory of the elect Church.'

The great field at present for the exercise of 'Aggressive Christianity,' is of course that which is provided by the innumerable churches and chapels which are, as means of grace, thrown open to all men, the most thoughtless of those who attend them being regarded as Christians in the making.

Men will differ as to the precise moral and spiritual value of the *religiousness* which is thus created, but it can scarcely be denied that in the case of more persons than we suppose, conscience is quickened, morals improved, much evil restrained, and conformity to the conventional Christian standard of the day promoted. On the other hand it is equally true that many are thereby deluded

as to their true spiritual condition, by being led to rest in a state of mind and heart which is improving without being transforming.

It may indeed be said that, almost as a rule, God chooses his people from among those who have been thus prepared for the divine call by the training and teaching of other Christians in public assemblies and elsewhere. And, it is sure to be added that, in so doing the Lord not only stamps this course with His approval, but seems distinctly to proclaim its necessity as a preparatory work by means of which alone can men be fitted for the higher service to which God may ultimately call them.

I do not wonder that Christians should reason thus. The Jews who first became Christians did so; and with much plausibility. They saw that all who believed in Christ had first been either Jews or Proselytes of the Gate, and they very naturally supposed that Gentiles could only be fitted for 'the Kingdom' by a like training. And it was not till the Spirit of God first, through Peter's experience in the case of Cornelius, and then, by special revelation to Paul taught them a different lesson, that they became willing to allow that divine purposes were not necessarily in accordance with their prejudices.

The subsequent sweeping away of the entire Mosaic

Economy must, before it took place, have seemed one of the most unlikely things in the world, and its actual removal, when at last it occurred, could not but appear to them the most profound of mysteries. For was it not obvious that Judaism was the only breakwater that could save the world from being flooded with heathenism; that if it disappeared, every check to immorality would be removed; and that whatever might be said about God's design to gather a people to His praise out of the Gentile world, it could only be done in the way it always had been done, viz., by processes adapted gradually to fit the mind for the reception of higher truth. And there can be little doubt that after the destruction of Jerusalem, this thought, this erroneous belief, led to the rapid establishment of a state of things as like to Judaism as Christianity could well be made; to a system which, in the form of Romanism, still dominates, and more or less overshadows the Protestant Churches.

And here it may be observed that one great reason why so many seem to obtain spiritual life through aggressive action is, that almost all persons—the sinner and the saint alike—suppose public preaching to be God's appointed way of meeting the impenitent. Hence men who are at all thoughtful, or desirous, from whatever motive, of escaping future punishment and of

enjoying future happiness, habitually place themselves under the preaching of the Gospel, and expect, in that form, to be acted upon. With the same object in view, they read the Scriptures, peruse tracts, and listen without anger to the entreaties of those who love them, to repent and come to the Saviour. And the cases are not few in which men do this for years, under the hope, as they say, that some word may produce the desired conviction, and lead to that consciousness of safety which it is their great aim to attain to.

Multitudes thus continually acted upon by a pressure like that of the atmosphere which is incessant, do often unquestionably find what they seek; and believing themselves to be 'in Christ,' or at least hoping that this is the case, are content to settle down in the religious world as respectable men, and sometimes as zealous partizans, without ever having been essentially changed. Others, under the teaching and discipline of God. grow into Christ's likeness, and (it may be long after their professed conversion) really pass from death unto life. Everything being thus thrown, as it were, by public opinion and habit into one channel, it naturally follows that almost all spiritual influence seems to be identi-Nor should it be forgotten that in fied therewith. cases where impressions are permanent, the preacher commonly reaps what he has not sown, viz., the fruits

of early education and of a thousand influences each in itself too minute for notice, but the aggregate of which is all-important. He commonly reaps in this way the harvest of a past of which he thinks little, although he prospers, for the most part, only when he labours in a field already white for the sickle.

All this, of course, proceeds in forgetfulness of the fact, that while our responsibility for exercising a right temper of mind as to the condition of men is unlimited and universal, our responsibility, in relation to any given outward act, is limited and special.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE STORM.

A STORM of indignation will, I am quite aware, burst upon the head of the author when it is clearly seen that the tendency of what he has written is, in the name of Christ and Christianity, to check evangelizing effort among the masses, to discourage both the street preacher and the popular orator in their appeals to the unconverted, to deny the value of tracts and books innumerable, and to maintain that their indiscriminate circulation is, on the whole, more likely to do harm than good.

Revivalists of every shade, Established Churchmen, Nonconformists of all classes, the good and the bad, the earnest and the formal, will, in this instance, all unite to pour their vials of wrath on an offender who, if liberty of speech had not run wild, they would all agree ought not to be tolerated. Before, however, such extremity of anger is allowed to have its way, it might be well quietly and calmly to consider what has been

said, since it may all be summed up in a very few simple propositions.

They are the following:-

i. God has not made any man's eternal condition dependent on the zeal and fidelity of a fellow-creature. Therefore no human being can possibly be excluded from hope hereafter because the Gospel has not been brought to him on earth. Salvation is in the hands of God, and not in the hands of man.

ii. The limitations of Christ's work on earth; His apparent neglect of the spiritual condition of the multitude; His all but exclusive care and prayers for the few disciples by whom He was surrounded; with all that is involved in that Election of grace which He proclaimed, point most unmistakeably to a work of mercy to be carried on after death.

iii. The calm and tranquil spirit of the apostles in view of the wickedness by which they were encompassed; the apparent absence of all anxiety about their unconverted friends and relatives; the addresses of St. Paul to Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and the Athenians; the broad difference Paul makes in his dealings with sinners, and with persons 'called to be saints;' his passionate desire for the spiritual welfare of his countrymen, although he says 'All Israel shall be saved,' compared with his perfect willingness to leave

heathendom in the hands of God,—all these things indicate a trust in the Divine wisdom and love, founded on the conviction that Christ would 'judge the world in righteousness,' and on a consciousness that it was not permitted him to do more than to herald the Gospel to those who knew it not.

iv. That as, at the first propagation of Christianity, those who were 'ordained' (or set in order) 'to eternal life' received the word readily and 'gladly,' so it is still. Those whom the Gospel truly reaches receive it into their hearts as seed cast on good ground, and live thereby. Those who receive it not cannot be helped by The duty of the Christian therefore, who has made known 'the truth as it is in Jesus' to any one, is not to reiterate and support the message of love by appeals and entreaties, but to live the Gospel, careful only not to lower its claims in any particular; not to attempt its adaptation to any of the apparent needs of society; not to imagine he can promote its reception by anything that is merely formal or outward; but, abiding in faith, to leave all in the hands of God, assured that He who 'turns the hearts of the children of men as the rivers of water are turned,' will, in His own good time, accomplish all that is needed, whether for the furtherance of His own glory, or for the everlasting welfare of His creatures.

v. That the 'plan of salvation,' so called, is a purely human construction, drawn indeed from Scripture, but deduced by fullible mortals who, in its preparation were biassed by the traditions of centuries, and prone to forget that they were dealing with matters far beyond the knowledge or experience of the wisest and best of men.

vi. That the Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is 'good news' to all men, involving as it does the proclamation of pardon for all, and of privilege for the elect, the few being chosen for the ultimate benefit of the many.

vii. That as in nature, so in grace, distinctions are to be drawn between that which belongs to man, and is in the sphere of the natural, from that which is altogether supernatural, and belongs to a sphere with which men cannot intermeddle. That while God is 'the Saviour of all men,' He is specially so 'of them that believe;' that as the late Edward Bickersteth has put it, "there are a thousand stages and variations of union with Christ, distinguishable from the glory of the elect church."

viii. That human life is educational; since God is here training a peculiar people for high and noble service, and in degree all men for the world to come.

The practical conclusions following the acceptance of these propositions may be thus stated:—

- 1. The object of the Christian dispensation, so far as it has yet been developed, is evidently the calling out of the world of 'a peculiar people, zealous of good works,' and their training by a supernatural discipline for high service in the world that is to come. The conversion of the world to God now has evidently never formed a part of the Divine design, inasmuch as adequate means have never been provided for its accomplishment.
- 2. The return of the Lord Jesus in great glory, with all His holy angels, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on 'the new earth,' is the indispensable prelude to the triumph of righteousness, and to the coming of that time when the will of God shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.
- 3. That until that day shall come, the work of the Church is simply to represent Christ in the world by living as He lived, and thus to become both light and salt to the earth.
- 4. That in attempting to do spiritual good to others, Christians are bound to act only in harmony with 'the Spirit of truth, the Comforter; to confine their efforts, therefore, to the limits He has laid down, and hence to abstain from attempting more than to convince men of

the evil of sin, the strength and beauty of righteousness, and the certainty of future judgment, when every man shall receive 'according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad.'

5. That consequently they are called upon, by their allegiance to Christ, to refrain from offering to unbelievers the privileges and blessings of the elect; to avoid everything calculated to foster delusions as to the future; to shrink from attempting to take their fellow-creatures out of the hands of God, as if they loved them better than He; and to beware of imagining that by their prayers or tears, their entreaties or their appeals, they can bring them into life, or effect that change of heart which can only be accomplished by the Redeemer.

The reasons for this limitation may not always be obvious to us. But we may gather some of them, I think, from observing the evils which have arisen from a contrary course of proceeding, however well-intentioned may have been the motives of those who have adopted it. Among these may be enumerated the following:—

1. Romanism, and every other form of corrupted religion, all of which base themselves upon the supposed duty and necessity of bringing entire populations, externally at least, under the sway of Christianity.

- 2. NATIONAL RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS, proceeding on the supposition that a country may be Christianized as readily as an individual, and so far fostering outward profession, whether accompanied or not by a corresponding inward life.
- 3. Sectarianism, in its innumerable forms, with its property, its professional ministries, its jealousies, its perversions of truth, and its evil spirit, all resting on the supposed duty to convert mankind, each sect drawing its support from additions made to its ranks by the reception as Christians of persons more or less touched by appeal, more or less actually under the influence of Christian principle.

Such are the more obvious and general results of the course that has been pursued. But these by no means exhaust the mischief that has been occasioned. Priestcraft with its abominations, and persecution with its horrors, have in all ages been called into existence thereby; while in our own time, from the same cause, money has come to be regarded as a chief means of promoting spiritual work, and mechanical appliances of all kinds have been unduly exalted, as if they could promote truth and righteousness. The return of the Lord has been all but universally ignored or denied. The Kingdom of God has been altogether lost sight of in its heavenly and restorative aspects. Christian

morality has been lowered in order to meet supposed secular necessities. Both Prayer and Praise have been perverted and abused by being turned from their appropriate spheres in order that they might be made engines of attack on the ungodly. Noise, excitement, public advertisements, street placards, and every other force that the newspaper or the novel can furnish have been employed, to the great damage of spiritual Christianity, in promoting the supposed work of One whose chief characteristic was silence and retirement, of One whose voice 'was not heard in the streets,' and whose labours were as quiet and as retired as it was possible for them to be made. Whether these things are so or not every man can judge.

One word more. There are those, and they are not a few, who will exclaim, when they have finished reading these pages, What would he have us to do?

To this question I can only reply, I have not sought to induce any one as yet to do more than CONSIDER. I shall be abundantly satisfied if that end is attained. It is sometimes better to be presented with something to think about than with anything to do.

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